

Nationalism and Terror

Ante Pavelić and Ustasha Terrorism
from Fascism to the Cold War



Pino Adriano *and* Giorgio Cingolani

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Pino Adriano *and* Giorgio Cingolani

Translated by
Riccardo James Vargiu



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Part

1

**The Ustasha Movement
from its Origins to 1941**

Chapter 1

Origins

THE REGICIDE

Ante Pavelić and the Ustasha, a subversive organization devoted to Croatia's independence, made headlines all over the world on 9 October 1934, with the spectacular terrorist attack in which the Yugoslav king Alexander I Karađorđević and the French foreign affairs minister, Jean Louis Barthou, lost their lives. The Serbian king had reached Marseilles aboard the cruiser *Dubrovnik*, and was expected in Paris and London to renew the alliance binding the young Kingdom of Yugoslavia to France and Great Britain. In the port of ancient Massilia, the king was greeted by his friend Barthou, the man behind French policies in the Balkan–Danubian area, and by General Alphonse Joseph Georges, a distinguished fighter in the Great War. After the fanfare, the three took their seats in an old Delage convertible used for such ceremonies, and the procession entered the Canebière, which was crammed with people. Marseilles was teeming with journalists and photographers, for the French press had long suspected a terrorist attack. Yet the police patrol left much to be desired. The uncovered car was a conspicuous target, no barricades had been erected to keep people on the sidewalk, and policemen, one every six or seven meters, faced the procession with their backs to the crowd. In front of the Palais de la Bourse, a man in dark clothes dashed toward the limousine screaming “Long live the king!,” jumped on the footboard, and hugged the monarch. The crowd laughed and cheered, and no one heard the two shots fired at close range at the king's chest. Chaos broke out immedi-

ately after. In quick succession, the attacker then fired a shot at General Georges (who tried to grab him by the shoulders), got wounded by the saber of a mounted officer, and fired his weapon against other agents, killing one of them. The terrorized crowd ran in all directions, and the police started shooting at random. Four spectators were killed, and a hundred or so were injured. When reinforcements arrived, very late, the king was already dead, as was his killer, riddled with shots and trampled on by the crowd. General Georges had nearly perished by the time he was brought to the hospital, but the doctors managed to save him. Minister Barthou was not as lucky. While he had only been wounded near his left elbow, the bullet had severed an artery, and the bleeding was discovered too late, proving fatal.

The investigations carried out by the Sureté quickly led to the arrest of three accomplices in the regicide, and to the Ustasha network's being identified as having organized the attack under the leadership of Ante Pavelić. On 11 October, the official newspaper of the French Socialist Party, *Le Populaire* ran the headline "The Croatian Separatist Organization of Which the Marseilles Assassin Was a Member Is Directed and Funded by Fascist Italy." Later, it became known that Pavelić's headquarters was in Turin, and that hundreds of Ustasha were being trained to use weapons and explosives in clandestine bases located in Italy and in Hungary. Although the evidence found by the French investigators left no doubt as to the complicity of Hungarian and Italian authorities with Croatian terrorists, the French prime minister wasted no time in reassuring the Italian ambassador in Paris that his government was "firmly determined to pour oil over troubled waters."¹

The British cabinet followed the French government's lead. While Alexander I had been a precious ally and friend of both Great Britain and France, their two governments not only failed to tackle the issue with any kind of resolve, but actually put a damper on it for fear of

1 *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani* (henceforth DDI), 7th series, vol. 16, doc. 71, 67. English translations of all primary sources are our own, unless otherwise noted.

Origins

setting off an international crisis that would force them to engage in a dangerous test of strength. In 1914, the murder of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria in Sarajevo had sparked off the Great War. The assassination of Alexander I might occasion a new conflict in the Balkan–Danubian area, with grave repercussions throughout Europe. The situation was very tense to begin with. Two months before the incident in Marseilles, Austrian Nazis had killed Chancellor Dollfuss, a proud opponent of Hitler’s plan to unify Germany and Austria. The French and British needed Mussolini to contain Hitler’s expansionist ambitions. As a result, even though they were aware of Italy’s dealings with Croatian terrorists aimed at breaking up Yugoslavia, they did not want to bring the Duce to the dock. The Yugoslav government petitioned the League of Nations to condemn Hungary and Italy for instigating Pavelić, but the matter was resolved with a bland admonishment of the Hungarian government, while Fascist Italy was left unscathed. France’s requests that the Ustasha leader be extradited were also rejected, and the latter was kept safe in prison in Turin, where he lived in a comfortable pied-à-terre. When the Court of Aix-en-Provence tried him in absentia and sentenced him to death for regicide, Pavelić and his family were transferred to southern Italy, to a handsome villa rented by the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Cava de’ Tirreni. Meanwhile, the 400 Ustashas of his small army were sent to several locations in Calabria, Sicily, and the island of Lipari, where Mussolini arranged for their material support until the time was ripe to throw them back into the fray.

THE CROATIAN–BOSNIAN ORIGINS OF USTASHISM

Ante Pavelić was born in 1889 in Bradina, a small town halfway between Sarajevo and Mostar. His family was Croatian, and devoutly Catholic. His father was a building contractor who worked for the railroad company, while his uncle Milan was a Jesuit who would later become dear to the Ustasha thanks to his poem “Pod Okom Božjim”

(Under the eye of God).² Bradina lay on the border between Bosnia and Herzegovina, lands over which Serbs, Croats, and Byzantines had fought for centuries. Bosnia and Herzegovina had been a part of the Ottoman Empire from the mid-1400s to the late 1800s, when they were conquered by the Habsburg and annexed into the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Around 1900, the Bosnian-Herzegovinian region as a whole had a population of about 1,800,000. There were Jewish and Romanian minorities, but the vast majority was made up of roughly 700,000 Orthodox, 550,000 Muslims, and 400,000 Catholics.³

Ante Pavelić received his first formal education at the episcopal school in Travnik. This was an ancient and thriving town, which had also been the seat of the Ottoman government for Bosnia and Herzegovina, housing many bazaars and mosques. Following the Austrian occupation, the institutions of the Roman Church had once again flourished in town, and in 1882 a Jesuit delegation had arrived to “direct the minor seminary of Travnik, as well as the major one, with the institute of theology and philosophy, in Sarajevo.”⁴ Noteworthy among the early students of the seminary in Travnik was Ivan Šarić, Bosnia’s future apostolic vicar and a staunch champion of the Ustasha doctrine. Next was Pavelić, followed a few years later by a third student, Krunoslav Draganović, who in time would become a priest, Šarić’s secretary, and finally an organizer of the escape routes used by Ustasha and Nazi criminals to reach the southern seas. Thus, the fates of these three Croats hailing from Bosnia-Herzegovina, who would place the Ustasha cause at the center of their lives, crossed in Travnik.

The lesson in national history they were taught in school fastened itself to their minds like a nail in a sure place, until it became their creed: “The Croatian state was founded in the seventh century,” Pavelić would later write in his political program; “by 925, when King Tomislav was

2 Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Direzione Generale della Pubblica Sicurezza, Archivio dell’Ispettore Ercole Conti (henceforth ACS/DGPS/AEC), b. 17/56–9, 15.2.1940.

3 Jedin, *Storia della Chiesa*, 213.

4 Kokša, “Croatia,” vol. 3, 286.

crowned in Duvanjsko Polje, in Bosnia, Croatia was an entirely organized Christian country. [...] And it included the current provinces of 'Banat' Croatia with Medjumurje, Slavonia and Syrmia, Dalmatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina."⁵ In a similar vein, Draganović would boast about the merits Croats gained with their defense of Christianity: "In Christian Europe's titanic struggle against Islamic aggression, the Croatian people stood fast on the front line for five long centuries, defending Catholicism and Western culture. The noble title of Antemurale Christianitatis that Pope Leo X bestowed on it is not merely a pretty award, but first and foremost a bloody reality."⁶ There is no denying that an ancient Kingdom of Croatia existed, or that the Croatian people acted as a bulwark of Christianity. The Ustasha doctrine, however, while founded on these premises, blotted out eight centuries of history and used myth as a justification for its revisionism. It seems appropriate to provide some historical background, the better to understand the unique intertwining of Croatian history and the evangelizing mission of the Roman Church in the Balkans.

The forefathers of Croats, Slovenes, and Serbs settled in the Western Balkan Peninsula between the sixth and the seventh century AD, in the course of several migratory waves. According to an ancient chronicle, Croats settled in the Roman province of Dalmatia around the year 640. Pope John IV, who was Dalmatian, sent his legate Martin to negotiate with the new arrivals, and Croats converted to Christianity.⁷ For three centuries the situation was very unstable, and only in 925 did the first Croatian state structure arise, when Duke Tomislav, after unifying possessions along the Dalmatian coast with Slavonia, crowned himself king of Croatia. On that occasion, Pope John X coined the expression *fili specialissimi* of the Holy Roman Church for Croats. Tomislav's

5 Ante Pavelić, "Dalla prigione di Torino al Procuratore della Repubblica presso la Corte di Appello di Aix-en-Provence," Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Quai d'Orsay-Paris (henceforth AMAE), Série Contrôle des étrangers 1915-1940, Supplément, vol. 131, 85-86.

6 Draganović, *Croazia Sacra*, 183.

7 Ibid., 3.

successors, though, once again started wavering between Rome and Byzantium, and Gregory VII had to arrange for the armed intervention of a Norman prince to reestablish order. In 1075, the papal legate Gebizo offered the crown to Zvonimir Trpimirović. The latter swore allegiance and submission to the supreme pontiff, thus becoming king of Croatia and Dalmatia. When the East–West Schism sanctioned the split between Constantinople and Rome, Zvonimir became the defender of the Roman Church on the border with Raška, ancient Serbia, and Zeta, ancient Montenegro, two territories loyal to the Byzantine patriarch. Under King Zvonimir the land experienced peace and tranquility, with many Benedictine abbeys prospering as a result. Yet this Croatian–Dalmatian kingdom, which Pavelić saw as the historical Croatia, lasted only fifteen years, for at Zvonimir’s death the country was plunged into anarchy again. Another faithful son of the Church, King Ladislaus I of Hungary, reclaimed Slavonia, and in 1102 his successor, Coloman, agreed to the *Pacta conventa*, a treaty with the Croats whereby the fate of Croatia came to be indissolubly tied with that of Hungary, a situation that remained in place until the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918.

Bosnia established itself as a kingdom in 1180, but in 1463 the Ottomans invaded it. The last Bosnian monarch, Stjepan Tomašević, lost his life on the field, whereas the queen mother, Katarina Vukčić-Kosača, took refuge in Rome as a guest of the Church and became a Franciscan tertiary. Meanwhile, Katarina’s two other sons had been kidnapped by the Turks and converted to Islam. To prevent the crown from falling into sacrilegious hands, the queen left it to the Holy See. It was 1478, and Pope Sixtus IX, Francesco della Rovere of Savona, became the new virtual ruler of the Kingdom of Bosnia. Before ascending to the papal throne, Della Rovere had been the minister general of the Order of the Friars Minor for seven years, and that land was particularly close to his heart for its role as a stronghold of the Franciscan apostolate.

BOSNIAN FRIARS

Franciscans arrived in Bosnia sometime around 1340. They were sent from Rome as inquisitors to root out the heresy of the Bosnian Church, which had spread to the entire region.⁸ The struggle to restore Rome's authority was obstinate. Franciscans were accused of resorting to the practice of forced conversions—those who refused to be baptized lost their possessions and were compelled to leave the country or die. Franciscans established a Bosnian mission (eventually a vicariate), which extended from the Adriatic to the Black Sea, and “comprised over sixty monasteries and 700 missionary friars” by the mid-1400s.⁹ Sixteen of these convents lay within the bounds of Bosnia proper.¹⁰

Under Ottoman rule, the Roman Church lost a large part of its substantial properties (lands, churches, and convents). Many men of the cloth retreated to Dalmatia and Hungary, until finally only Franciscans remained on the field. During the Ottoman period, the population was divided into three communities (*millets*) based on religious affiliation; there were Muslims, Orthodox Christians, and Catholics. Franciscan friars became the leaders of this last class: “Each day Bosnian friars had to deal with secular matters, acquainting themselves with the profession of Turkish and Balkan politics, and paying ordinary tributes, as well as additional, oppressive taxes, thus becoming the typical and constitutive Catholic element of the Ottoman establishment in Bosnia.”¹¹ The Ottoman administration respected the Catholic community, but it did not favor it, and friars came to its defense. Instances of rebellion and hotbeds of revolt were not hard to come by, and thus was born the legend of the “insurgent” (*ustaše* in Serbo-Croatian).

8 The Holy See accused the Bosnian Church of dualist and Manichaean heresy. Some historians group the Bosnian heresy in with the Bogomil one, that is, with the belief system held by the movement founded in the tenth century by the Bulgarian priest Bogomil, which spread to Constantinople and the Balkans in the course of the following centuries. See Malcolm, *Storia della Bosnia*, 54–74.

9 Kokša, “Croatia,” vol. 3, 277.

10 Malcolm, *Storia della Bosnia*, 43.

11 Kokša, “Croatia,” vol. 3, 280.

With the shift from Ottoman to Austrian rule, the religious landscape changed greatly. In 1855, the Holy See had signed a lucrative agreement with Austria, and the provisions of that arrangement were extended to its new possessions. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Roman Church recovered the assets it had lost over four centuries of Ottoman domination and reorganized ecclesiastical institutions, particularly those pertaining to the secular clergy, the most impoverished. Alone on the land for centuries, Bosnian friars continued to regard themselves as the sole representatives of their people. This engendered competence conflicts so harsh that drastic intervention on the part of the pope himself finally became necessary to reinstate order and respect for hierarchies. In 1881, Pope Leo XIII created the “ecclesiastical province of Bosnia-Herzegovina,” under the guidance of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, known by its Latin name *Propaganda Fide*.¹² Bosnian friars were forced to comply, “which meant the end of their centuries-old special status, and the loss of many privileges.”¹³ But not all was lost. The new “province,” whose first apostolic vicar was Archbishop Josip Stadler, was centered on the metropolitan archdiocese of Vrhbosna (the ancient name of Sarajevo). The rest of the country was divided into three dioceses: the one based in Banja Luka for the north, and the ones based in Mostar and Trebinje for the south.¹⁴ A bishop of the Order of Friars Minor was appointed as ordinary of Mostar, with his jurisdiction extending to the diocese in Trebinje. Thus, the southern part of the country effectively remained a Franciscan stronghold. As we shall see, Bosnian Franciscans would end up being the most passionate supporters of Ante Pavelić and of his program to establish a Greater Croatia.

¹² This powerful institution was in charge of missionary activity in those large parts of the world where other religions—including the schismatic Orthodox faith—were dominant, like Serbia, Albania, Bulgaria, and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

¹³ Kokša, “Croatia,” vol. 3, 285–86.

¹⁴ Unione missionaria del clero in Italia, *Guida delle missioni cattoliche*, 351–61; *Le missioni cattoliche dipendenti da Propaganda Fide*, 35.

SOUTH SLAVS: NATIONAL IDEA AND STATE PROJECTS

The matter of national identity took hold among South Slavs in the first half of the nineteenth century, thanks to the work of both Serbian and Croatian intellectuals. After Serbia freed itself from the Ottoman Empire around 1830, the project of a Greater Serbia grounded on the myth of the fourteenth-century Kingdom of Serbia started to develop. The core beliefs of this ideology were defined in *Načertanije*, a text published in 1844 by Ilija Garašanin, Serbia's foreign affairs minister at the time. This document—a classic of nineteenth-century nationalism, particularly exemplary of the Serbian unification myth—placed Serbia front and center in the struggles to dismantle the Turkish and Austrian empires, and pushed for it to expand, in order to become a great state under the leadership of the Serbian dynasty.¹⁵ The merit of renewing Serbian culture and language, a decisive contribution to the definition of Serbs' national identity, belongs to another great Serbian intellectual, Vuk Stefanović Karadžić. Deeply Serbocentric, Karadžić regarded all South Slavs as Serbs. Slovenes he considered Austrian or Highland Serbs; Croats of Dalmatia he saw as “Roman” Serbs; inland Croats he made out to be Hungarianized Catholic Serbs; finally, Bosnian Muslims he considered Serbs converted to Islam.¹⁶ Karadžić was the first author to speak of “cleansing” (*očišćenje*) with regard to the expulsion and extermination of the Ottoman population during the liberation of Belgrade in 1807.¹⁷

In those same years, 1840–58, Illyrism, a cultural movement aimed at unifying South Slavs through language and literature, was flourishing in Croatia.¹⁸ “Illyrians,” Ljudevit Gaj most prominently among them, had the great merit of codifying a new literary language in

15 Stanišić, *Projekti Velika Srbija*, 14. See also Janković, *Srbija i jugoslovensko pitanje 1914–1915*, 51.

16 Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, *Sabrana dela Vuka Karadžića*, Belgrade, 1969, 31–40.

17 Karadžić, *Praviteljstvujušči sovijet serbski za vreme Karadžićeva*, 6.

18 Two important “Illyrist” works were those by Seljan, *Zemljopis pokrajina ilirskih iliti ogledalo zemlje* (1843), and Gaj, *Dogodovštine velike Illirije* (1840).

Croatia, the Štokavo dialect. Spoken by both Serbs and Croats, with some differences, the new language removed a large part of the barriers separating the two. Indeed, the assumption was that linguistic and national boundaries were one and the same—that is, that language was the essence of nationality. While always restricted to an élite, in the second half of the nineteenth century, Illyrism paved the way to Yugoslavism, the belief that the only antidote to outside interference rested in the unification of all South Slavs. Among the promoters of this idea, the Croatian bishop Josip Strossmayer played a primary role by championing the cultural, political, and religious union of Catholics and Orthodox Christians. The push for federation enjoyed wide support among the masses of Croatian peasants, but was not shared by the urban bourgeoisie, which preferred to remain within Austria's sphere of influence rather than risk falling under Serbian rule. Even though Yugoslavism gained more traction in Croatia than in Serbia, Strossmayer and Garašanin joined forces to produce a program for the birth of a Yugoslav state, independent of both Turkey and Austria. Yet the dream only lasted two years, before disagreements broke out between Serbs and Croats on Bosnia-Herzegovina, whose territory they both claimed for themselves. And there were also deeper reasons for discord: Croats envisaged a federal structure for the new state, whereas Serbs, who had freed themselves from Turkish rule spurred by their nationalism, could not relinquish their Serbocentric vision.

In the meantime, the Croatian Party of Rights, an emanation of the agrarian and military aristocracy, was radically opposed to any federative project. Founded by Ante Starčević and Eugen Kvaternik around 1860, this ultranationalist (and strikingly clerical) party maintained the primacy of the Croatian race over all Balkan peoples, and that there existed an “eternal and natural Croat right” to absolute state sovereignty. In Starčević's view, all South Slavs were originally Croats. Slovenes were “Highland Croats”; Serbs were “Orthodox Croats,” or “an unclean race” of various origins; and Bosnian-Herzegovinian Muslims were Croats of the purest blood. All these people would ultimately give rise to a single

Croatian nation within a strong unitary state.¹⁹ Serbs, dubbed “Slavoserbs” by Starčević, were doubly slaves, for their name came from the Latin words *slavus* and *servus*. Slavoserbs were a corrupt, greedy, deceitful, and dishonest people, for whom there was no remedy other than the use of the stick.²⁰ Jews were “a race lacking, with few exceptions, all morals and a homeland. To allow Jews to take part in public life is like throwing mud into a glass of pure water—it makes all the water murky.”²¹

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Starčević had considerable influence on students and young intellectuals. The first generations “of political leaders in Dalmatia, Istria, and Bosnia-Herzegovina were formed largely on his mold.”²² A proud ally of Starčević, as well as a former classmate of his, Eugen Kvaternik attempted an armed revolt against the Habsburg Empire in 1871, starting in Rakovika, a small town in Lika. Amateurishly organized and lacking popular support, however, his attempt at revolution was immediately crushed by the Austro-Hungarian army. Kvaternik paid with his life, Starčević was sentenced to jail time, and the Party of Rights was dissolved. In 1895, with the elderly Starčević’s blessing, the lawyer Josip Frank founded the Croatian Pure Party of Rights (Čista Stranka Prava), which opposed any kind of cooperation between Serbs and Croats. In 1911, after Josip’s death, the party passed under his son Ivica’s leadership, and gained momentum during the war.

YUGOSLAV PEOPLES AND THE GREAT WAR

After studying in Travnik, the young Pavelić went to Zagreb to further his education at the Franz Joseph University and enrolled in the Croa-

19 Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 86–87. Ante Starčević (1823–1896), considered the founding father of the Croatian nation, studied theology in the Catholic seminary of Pest, but changed his mind on the threshold of priesthood and pursued a career as a lawyer in Zagreb.

20 Ante Starčević, *Istočno pitanje*, in Božilova, “Yugoslavism and pravaštvo in the mid-19th century,” 58 and 47.

21 Gross, *Izvorno pravaštvo-ideologija, agitacija, pokret*, 635.

22 Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 89.

tian Party of Rights student association, whose leadership he soon took on. In 1915, immediately after earning his law degree, he became a party representative in the Croatian Diet. The country had been at war for a year, but Pavelić was exempted from military service for tuberculosis and joined a law firm as an apprentice. As subjects of the Habsburg Empire, Croats fought alongside Austria, which had waged war against Serbia after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, on 28 June 1914. A few weeks before the killing, regency of the Serbian monarchy had been assumed by Alexander Karađorđević, distinguished as a successful leader in the Balkan Wars. The young regent led the Serbian army in the Great War, but was unable to stand his ground against the Austrian troops, and on 24–25 November 1915 he was defeated in the Battle of Kosovo. The Serbian government, presided by the Radical Party leader Nikola Pašić sought refuge in Corfu. Meanwhile, the National Yugoslav Committee promoting the union of Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia as equals was set up in London under the presidency of the Dalmatian Ante Trumbić. The committee was prompted by Croatian and Slovenian politicians—Pavelić himself took part in some clandestine meetings held in Trieste—and had two objectives: to achieve “the independence of Yugoslav lands” and to prevent “the concession of any such lands to Italy.”²³ While Italy was entering the war on the side of the Entente in exchange for large concessions in the Adriatic region, Croatian supporters of national independence viewed Trieste, Istria, and Dalmatia as belonging to their nation. The Italian-Yugoslav dispute came into view at this time, before eventually breaking out with full force at the end of the conflict, when the parties involved realized that the key players of the war had promised the same lands to both camps in order to secure victory.

On 20 July 1917, Nikola Pašić for the Serbian government in exile and Ante Trumbić for London’s Yugoslav Committee drafted the Corfu Declaration, which set the guidelines for the future King-

²³ Cattaruzza, *L'Italia e il confine orientale*, 82–83.

dom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Serbs ensured that the hereditary right to the crown of the new kingdom was placed in the hands of the Karađorđević family, and by this recognition effectively sanctioned the existence of a *primus inter pares*. In the subsequent Geneva Conference of 6–9 November 1918, it was decided that the union would be a confederation, at least in its early stages. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes was formed on 10 December 1918 under the regency of Alexander Karađorđević, who ascended to the throne in 1921 with the name of Alexander I. In the new state, which included Montenegro and was set up as a parliamentary hereditary monarchy, political life was centered on Belgrade. By controlling the kingdom's administration and army, Serbs imposed their hegemony over Croats and Slovenes.

The Serbian monarchy had fought on the winning side, and at the peace table the new kingdom easily obtained the expansion of its borders to the detriment of its defeated neighbors, Austria, Hungary, and Bulgaria. Negotiations with Italy—which, like Serbia, had won the war—proved more complex.

ITALIAN INTERESTS IN THE YUGOSLAV REGION, AND THE CONTENTION BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES

The birth of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes dealt a harsh blow to Italy's foreign policy and expansionist aims. For the better part of half a century, the questions of the "eastern border" and "Adriatic" had been central to Italian public debate, mobilizing great economic and political interests. After the Ottoman retreat from Bosnia-Herzegovina (1878), Austria had promised "no modification to the status quo would ever occur in the Balkans without Italy being consulted about it." This understanding—the result of Minister of Foreign Affairs Di Robilant's prowess—lasted until 1914 and was decisive for the growth of Italian political and economic influence in the Danubian-Balkan region. At the same time, nationalist and "imperialist" literature calling for the completion of territorial unity by annexation of Trentino,

Julian Venetia, Trieste, Istria, and Dalmatia was flourishing in Italy. These demands were echoed by the Dante Alighieri Society, which fueled strong irredentism in the eastern Adriatic. But while roughly half of the population of Julian Venetia was Italian in the early 1900s (with the other half comprising Slovenes and Croats), only 50,000 Italians—less than one-tenth of the region's population—lived in the whole of Dalmatia, mostly concentrated in a few urban centers. What's more, nationalist literature and policies not only resorted to rhetoric emphasizing the Roman and Venetian past of Istria and Dalmatia, but also set forth “plans to repress and expel Slavs.”²⁴ Though admittedly in the minority, there were also those who viewed Italian claims in the eastern Adriatic as very dangerous. “The annexation of Dalmatia,” Salvemini maintained, “would harm Italy in every possible way: it would produce neither military security nor economic advantage [...] and it would ultimately lead to a long and costly use of the nation's energies.”²⁵

Meanwhile, Italian economic penetration in the Balkans and in the Danubian basin progressed at a fast pace, with an increasing commitment of men, companies, and capital to the area. In 1903, Giuseppe Volpi, a well-known businessman, founded the Oriental Commercial Society to exploit port and railroad concessions in Montenegro, which Italy intended to draw away from the Austrian and Serbian spheres of influence, and into the Italian one. Within a few years, Volpi's financial group was also active in Albania, through the Banco di Scutari, and in the area of Šibenik, through an anonymous society set up to harness Dalmatia's hydraulic resources. Other Italian companies, including G. Feltrinelli of Milan, exploited the woodlands of Bosnia-Herzegovina. In 1908, Italy concluded an agreement with Serbia, France, and Russia for the construction of a railroad connecting the Danube to the Adriatic. Italian steelworks like Terni and Ilva had large interests in the Balkans, as did the Banca Commerciale Italiana and the Banco

²⁴ Faucci, “Elementi di imperialismo nell'Italia prefascista,” 57 and 68.

²⁵ Apih, “Gaetano Salvemini e il problema adriatico,” 106. See also Borgatta, “Jugoslavia e interessi economico-commerciali dell'Italia,” 169–72.

di Roma. The few Italians who lived in Dalmatia made up the majority of the wealthiest class.

Claims in the Adriatic and economic presence in Danubian–Balkan Europe were thus a constant for Italy up until World War I, when the country was forced to choose its camp. Yet only in 1915, after the Treaty of London was signed, did Italy enter the war on the side of the Entente. By this agreement, Great Britain, France, and Russia pledged to transfer Trentino, South Tyrol, Trieste, Istria, southern Dalmatia, and a few islands over to Italy in exchange for its support in the war. Italy also asked to annex Fiume (Rijeka), the only Dalmatian city with a significant Italian population. Fiume was the most active commercial center on the eastern coast of the Adriatic, and—because of its port and railroad linking it with Zagreb and Budapest—it was an ideal base from which to expand in the Danubian–Balkan region. This request, however, was rejected.

The decades-long contention between Italy and Yugoslavia started before the armistice was even signed. On 29 October 1918, the National Council of Zagreb declared “the independence of all Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes of Austria-Hungary,” and started setting up “a national government, which was to complete the union with Serbia and Montenegro.”²⁶ Reverend Anton Korošec for the Slovene People’s Party, Doctor Ante Pavelić for the Croatian Party of Rights, and the Croatian Serb Svetozar Pribićević for the Croatian Democratic Party signed the declaration. As for their borders with Italy, Slovenia laid claim to Julian Venetia, where a large Slovenian population resided, while Croatia demanded Trieste, Istria, and the whole of Dalmatia. The Italian answer to the Declaration of Zagreb was immediate. That same day, the Italian National Council of Fiume, led by Antonio Grossich, proclaimed the annexation of the city by Italy.

Italy believed the Entente would honor the Treaty of London and counted on the accomplished annexation of Fiume to be accepted. The

26 Cattaruzza, *L'Italia e il confine orientale*, 116.

Paris Peace Conference, however, came as a rude awakening. Sidney Sonnino, the Italian foreign affairs minister, easily obtained Trentino and the part of Tyrol south of the Brenner Pass, but, when it came to the eastern borders, the road before him was barred by a Yugoslav memorandum presenting all the claims laid by Croats and Slovenes. The Treaty of London, which Sonnino demanded be fulfilled, was challenged by US president Wilson, who hadn't signed that agreement (the United States was still neutral in 1915), and believed it to have been rendered outdated by the events that followed. Wilson maintained that the Adriatic Sea ought to be shared by all countries facing it, and that the border between Italy and Yugoslavia ought to be founded on respect for ethnicity. Wilson's reasonable proposal was to grant Italy Julian Venetia, Trieste, and a large part of Istria, assigning the eastern coast of Istria, Fiume, and Dalmatia to Yugoslavia. Both sides rejected the proposal, though, and Italian representatives walked out of the peace conference for two weeks starting on 24 April 1919. Italian irredentist nationalism rose up against the Entente's betrayal and turned Fiume and Dalmatia into symbols of Italy's mutilated victory, when, in fact, Italy's political and military leaders had already placed the country on a path to national redemption many months before.

A PLAN FOR ACTION AMONG THE YUGOSLAVS AND THE CROATIAN COMMITTEE

In early November 1918, while the armistice was being signed in Villa Giusti, the Italian Army “occupied all the lands identified in the Treaty of London, settling in a greater part of Dalmatia than the one stipulated, and participated, with the Entente's troops, in the occupation of Fiume.”²⁷ Trieste housed the headquarters of the Military Government of Julian Venetia and the operative base for the “political-military information services of the government's entire territory.” The head

²⁷ Ibid., 128.

of the information office, the ITO (Informazioni Territori Occupati), was Colonel Cesare Finzi, an officer fluent in German, Hungarian, and French, with “a striking penchant for the information service.”²⁸

At the end of November, General Badoglio, the deputy chief of staff, received a “plan for action among the Yugoslavs” from Trieste, which emphasized strong anti-Serbian currents in Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia, Montenegro, and Macedonia, and proposed use of “widespread propaganda to incite the local populations’ separatist tendencies.”²⁹ The plan, elaborated by Colonel Finzi, called for a special unit of 200 agents and required an investment of several million lire. Badoglio submitted Finzi’s plan to Italy’s highest political and military authorities: by preventing a strong state from rising on the other side of the Adriatic, Italy would enjoy greater bargaining power with the Entente and open a path for itself toward eastern markets. On 9 December 1918, Minister of Foreign Affairs Sonnino, Prime Minister Orlando, and Chief of Staff Diaz approved the plan.³⁰

“Starting in December 1919,” according to a document of the Supreme Command of the Italian Army, “Lieutenant Colonel Finzi established a unit in Budapest, appointed to facilitate the repatriation to Yugoslavia of elements favorable to our interests, suitably indoctrinated, instructed, and designated to carry out various tasks. Naturally, this unit operated clandestinely.”³¹ In the first months of 1919, Finzi came in contact with Stjepan Radić, head of the Croatian People’s Peasant Party. In a report to Badoglio and Sonnino, Finzi wrote that Radić had voiced “a very strong liking for Italy” and stated that his party, firmly anti-Serbian, sought “a Croatian republic that was neutral, antimilitarist, economically strong, and friendly with Italy, even at the cost of

28 Marchetti, *Ventotto anni nel Servizio Informazioni Militari*, 95–96. Lieutenant Colonel Cesare Pettorelli Lalatta Finzi, an officer of the Italian military secret services, distinguished himself as an expert in anti-Austrian propaganda techniques, wiretapping, prisoner manipulation, and enemy troop infiltration. See Pettorelli Lalatta, *I.T.O.*

29 Caccamo, *L'Italia e la "Nuova Europa"*, 160.

30 *Ibid.*, 89–90.

31 Archivio dell'Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito (henceforth AUSSME), Fondo Commissione Interalleata di Parigi, 1918–32, Rep. E 8-116-2, 10.

sacrifice.”³² Finzi and Sonnino reached an agreement to arrange for a Croatian delegation to reach Versailles at once, so that Croats could make known before the peace conference their will to choose their own destiny. But the Serbian police arrested Radić and the entire directive committee of the Peasant Party. Finzi managed to acquire a letter Radić wrote in prison, containing a heartfelt plea to Sonnino: “In Zagreb, we have hidden a book with the signatures of 200,000 citizens and peasants, protesting against the Serbian occupation and the establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, and pleading with the Entente for their liberation.”³³ The Italian minister relayed Radić’s entreaty, but France and Great Britain refused to agree to it. In mid-May, Finzi brought a new document to Paris. The Peasant Party, forced into hiding, had produced a petition “for Croatia’s separation from Serbia, and its establishment as a neutral and independent republic.”³⁴ Sonnino passed the petition on to President Wilson, counting on American support to open the peace conference up to Croats, but this attempt failed as well.

In those months, Finzi also engaged in conversations with Ivica Frank, the exiled president of the Croatian Party of Rights. This political party had promptly reacted to the emergence of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. On 2 December 1918, party adherents—known as Frankists—had drawn up a manifesto stating that the Croatian people and its legal representatives had not been consulted and did not approve of Croatia’s and Serbia’s unification under the Karađorđević dynasty. A few days later, some military units had staged a harsh protest against the nascent kingdom in Zagreb, and the authorities had taken aim at the Frankists, closing down their newspaper *Hrvatska* and arresting some of their party leaders.³⁵ From that time on, a considerable number of Frankists, particularly former officers of the dissolved

³² DDI, 6th series, vol. 2, doc. 502, 344.

³³ Caccamo, *L'Italia e la "Nuova Europa"*, 163.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 167.

³⁵ Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 262.

Austro-Hungarian army, had chosen to live in exile, some of them settling in Austria, and others emigrating to Italy or Hungary. Ivica Frank himself had left Croatia, leaving Ante Pavelić at the head of the party in his capacity as secretary of the directive committee.

Exiled in Budapest, Frank requested help from the Italian government to organize an armed struggle against Serbs and institute an independent Croatian republic. In exchange for such help, Croatia would recognize Italy's claims as set forth in the Treaty of London. In early August 1919, Frank said he was ready to reach Rome to finalize these agreements, on Radić's behalf as well as on his own, but then was forced to reconsider his plans on account of Italy's changed political situation. After Orlando's government fell, the leadership of the country passed into the hands of Francesco Saverio Nitti, who wanted to set Italian foreign policy on a new course, "leaving the line of expansion and military intervention [and] resuming direct negotiations in Paris."³⁶ Nitti and Minister of Foreign Affairs Tommaso Tittoni had no intention of giving up on the Treaty of London plus Fiume, but they wanted to come to terms with Yugoslavia by making concessions on Dalmatia, and therefore had set aside all negotiations with Croatian separatists. Nitti's government, though, failed to impose its line on the military, single-handedly in charge of the situation along the eastern borders.³⁷ The march from Ronchi (11–12 September 1919) finally took place under these circumstances. Led by Gabriele D'Annunzio, rebel legionaries and soldiers entered Fiume before a cheering crowd, and the poet soldier took command of the holocaust city.

Once installed, the revolutionary government of Fiume initiated intense conspiratorial activity against the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and

³⁶ Alatri, *Nitti, D'Annunzio e la questione adriatica*, 80.

³⁷ In Trieste, radical nationalism was well represented by the Trento and Trieste National Association. Former fighters and volunteers from all over the country swelled its ranks or joined other local movements, such as the *Sursum Corda*, the Anti-Bolshevik Committee, or Trieste's Combat Fasces, all of which were effectively paramilitary organizations. See Visintin, *L'Italia a Trieste*, 82. See also Cattaruzza, *L'Italia e il confine orientale*, 137, and Pettorelli Lallata, *I.T.O.*, 283.

Slovenes. Three of D'Annunzio's lieutenants were especially industrious in this regard: Captain Host-Venturi, commander of Fiume's armed forces, Major Giovanni Giuriati, at the helm of D'Annunzio's cabinet and president of the Trento and Trieste Association, and the lawyer Eugenio Coselschi, a staunch irredentist and the poet's special secretary. In January 1920, Giuriati came into contact with Ivica Frank, who had just founded the Croatian Committee (Hrvatski Komite),³⁸ a revolutionary organization devoted to Croatia's secession from the newly established kingdom. The committee was active in Vienna and Budapest, where, thanks to support from the Hungarian government, it had organized a Croatian legion made up of volunteers, recruited among former prisoners and misfits of Croatian nationality. Sent to Fiume, Frank drafted an agreement with Giuriati in anticipation of an imminent revolt, "which would extend from Croatia to Bosnia and Montenegro, and lead to the destruction of Yugoslavia."³⁹

At the end of March, when it appeared the revolt was about to break out, new Italian military contingents reached Fiume. "Needless to say," Nitti wrote, "the Italian Royal Government has absolutely nothing to do with this madness, and it intends to keep out of it."⁴⁰ The tug-of-war between the head of the government and the military continued until June, when Nitti was forced to resign. The elections were won by Giovanni Giolitti, however, who distanced himself even more resolutely from this irredentist adventurism. In order to facilitate negotiations with Belgrade, Giolitti nominated Carlo Sforza, Italy's ambassador to the Serbian government during the war and a good friend of King Alexander, as his foreign affairs minister.

Meanwhile, the revolutionaries of Fiume continued to negotiate with Croatian separatists, until two conventions were signed on 5 July 1920. The first one was a "General Treaty" between the representatives

³⁸ Ivica Frank and Vladimir Sachs, together with Colonel Stjepan Duić and the former police functionary Manko Gagliardi, founded the Croatian Committee in Graz, in 1919.

³⁹ Caccamo, *L'Italia e la "Nuova Europa"*, 292.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 293.

of Commander D'Annunzio (Giuriati and Host-Venturi) and five representatives "of the nations oppressed by Serbia" (two Albanians, two Croats, and one Montenegrin). The contracting parties sought to initiate "a political and military movement" in their respective countries, which was to culminate in a "general offensive to occupy the entire Serbian territory under D'Annunzio's supreme command." The second one was a "particular treaty" between D'Annunzio's two men and the two "representatives of the Croatian nation," Ivica Frank and Vladimir Sachs. The agreement involved the future territorial relations between Italy and Croatia: the border between the two countries would follow the Treaty of London, with Fiume and a few islands being further handed over to Italy. Giuriati hurried back to Rome to get Sforza's assent. The foreign affairs minister listened carefully, read the treaties, and, in Giuriati's own account, ended the meeting with the following sentence: "Dear Major, at the present time consolidating Yugoslavia must be viewed as an essential interest for our country."⁴¹

FROM THE TREATY OF RAPALLO TO THE TREATY OF ROME

Count Sforza and the Yugoslav foreign affairs minister Trumbić found common ground and signed the Treaty of Rapallo on 12 November 1920. The border between the two countries was established along the Julian Alps, from Tarvisio to Snežnik (Monte Nevoso), at the eastern limit of Istria. Fiume was declared a free city. Yugoslavia received the whole of Dalmatia, except for the city of Zadar (Zara) and the islands of Cres, Lošinj, Palagruža, and Lastovo (Cherso, Lussino, Pelagosa, and Lagosta), which remained in Italian hands. Italians living in Dalmatia were given the right to keep their Italian citizenship. The 400,000 Slovenes and 100,000 Croats of Julian Venetia and Istria were not granted the same right; instead, Count Sforza invited them to re-

41 Giuriati, *Con D'Annunzio e Millo in difesa dell'Adriatico*, 162. The full text of the two conventions is provided in the appendix to Giuriati's book, 221–26.

main in “their natural centers of Gorizia and Trieste, which are very much Italian,” and solemnly promised that they would enjoy “the most ample freedom of language and culture.”⁴² The government of Belgrade ratified the agreement, as the Italian Chamber of Deputies and Senate did in Rome. At that point, D’Annunzio’s presence in Fiume could no longer be tolerated. After his attempts at solving the situation amicably proved ineffectual, Giolitti finally sent in the army, and the legionaries were forced to leave the city *manu militari*.

The Treaty of Rapallo was supposed to pave the way for cooperation agreements between Italy and Yugoslavia. Instead, it met with Croatian and Slovenian opposition in the parliament of Belgrade, the Skupština, and faced even greater resistance in Italy. Sforza’s vows remained unfulfilled, for Fascism was already emerging as a dominant force in frontier areas, and carrying out the radical assimilation of ethnic minorities by resorting to the organized violence of its action squads.

After D’Annunzio left the city, Fiume gave itself an autonomist government, and, on 23 October 1922, Italy and Yugoslavia signed a new pact sanctioning its independence. Five days later, however, after the March on Rome, Italy took the road of Fascism, and Mussolini—newly appointed head of the government—ordered the military occupation of Fiume, which was effectively annexed to Italy.

Nevertheless, a conciliatory foreign policy prevailed in the early years of Fascism. In 1920, Romania, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia had formed the Little Entente with France’s full support to safeguard peace treaties and prevent revisionist maneuvers on the part of Austria or Hungary. Competing with France, Mussolini resumed old plans for peaceful Italian penetration in the Danubian area and sought to strike a deal with Yugoslavia. Following this relative easing of hostility, on 27 January 1924, Italy and Yugoslavia signed the Treaty of Rome, whereby the city of Fiume itself was assigned to Italy, while the densely populated suburb of Sušak and the Baross basin were assigned to Yugoslavia.

⁴² Cattaruzza, *L'Italia e il confine orientale*, 163.

Origins

The treaty, which entailed a broad range of commercial agreements, as well as mutual neutrality in the event of conflict, was supposed to place “relations between the two countries on new grounds and contribute to defuse provocations in border areas.”⁴³ Yet Slovenes and Croats reacted by staging violent anti-Italian demonstrations, and the government of Belgrade was unable to ratify it.

⁴³ Ibid., 195.

The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes and Italy

THE UNITARY STATE OF SOUTH SLAVS

The life of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes was difficult from the start. The union of South Slavs was proclaimed as early as December 1918, yet it was only on 28 June 1921, after a complex gestation, that the Vidovdan Constitution was finally approved. The latter gave the new state the form of a hereditary parliamentary monarchy, and endowed it with a government and a parliament, the Skupština, both of them centralized and located in Belgrade. The results of the vote clearly show just how problematic the coexistence of the nations destined to make up the Yugoslav union would be. In a case rare to the point of being unique, the constitution was approved by a slim majority of 223 representatives, with 35 voting against it, and 185 abstaining from casting their vote. "Regions where the majority was favorable to it were Serbia, Bosnia, and Vojvodina; 70 percent of the representatives of Croatia-Slavonia, 60 percent of those from Slovenia, and 55 percent of those from Dalmatia abstained from voting, thus manifesting their protest against the kingdom's new order." The religious composition of the voters is another revealing piece of information: "75 percent of those who voted for the constitution were Serbian Orthodox, while 70 percent of those who abstained were Catholic."¹

¹ Pirjevec, *Il giorno di San Vito*, 40.

The implementation of the new state order met great resistance. Croatia, Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, accustomed to the meticulous Austrian administration, had to adapt to the far more slipshod and insatiable Serbian model. Austro-Hungarian-like military hierarchies were dismantled in Croatia and Slovenia in the name of the unity of the new army, which was dominated by the Serbian military caste. Zagreb had rebelled against this military centralization back in December 1918, when Croatian soldiers and officers refused to pledge their allegiance to the Serbian crown and instead “took to the streets with arms, demonstrating for an independent Croatian republic.”² The protest had been put down with bloodshed. Another episode of great tension had taken place in September 1920, when a peasant revolt broke out in the Croatian countryside against the requisition of pack animals for use in military drills.

In other regards, however, the unification was promoting the country’s modernization. The Croatian Peasant Party fought for agrarian reform and had a large following. Its founder and leader, Stjepan Radić, was an advocate of federalism, but on autonomist and republican foundations, and was therefore disliked in Belgrade. The Peasant Party—and the anti-Serbian Croatian Party of Rights—did not acknowledge the Vidovdan Constitution and deserted the parliament. Two other Croatian political forces contributed to setting up the first few governments, though: the Federalist Party led by Ante Trumbić, the foreign affairs minister until the Treaty of Rapallo, and the Democratic Party led by the Croatian Serb Svetozar Pribićević, the foreign affairs and education minister during the first years of the kingdom. Slovenia, too, was represented in nearly every ministry thanks to the work of the reverend Anton Korošec, a stalwart supporter of Yugoslavism and the leader of the majority Slovenian Catholic People’s Party. Still, early governments suffered repeated crises, due to strife between the two most important Serbian parties within the Skupština, Pašić’s Radical

2 Pavelić, “Dalla prigionia di Torino,” 83.

Party and Davidović's Democratic Party, allied to Pribićević's Croatian Democratic Party.

The elections held in March 1923 were a success for the Radical Party in Serbia and for the Peasant Party in Croatia. An agreement between Pašić and Radić was attempted, according to which Croats would recognize the validity of the constitution, and Serbs would grant Croatia administrative autonomy. Yet the two failed to reach an understanding, and Radić so escalated his opposition that he was forced to leave the country to avoid being tried for *lèse-majesté*. He went to Vienna, and then to London and Paris, seeking support for the Croatian cause. His attempts were in vain, for France and Great Britain had no interest in challenging their ally, the Serbian monarch. Disappointed by what he had found in the West, Radić went to Moscow to negotiate with the Bolsheviks. During his absence, his heir apparent, Vladko Maček, led the party. More moderate and pragmatic, Maček changed tactics. He established an opposition bloc of seventy Croatian representatives, and showed up in the Skupština to participate in parliamentary activity. By these means, he intended to fight against the regime's "eternal lawlessness, tyranny, and corruption," and refound the Yugoslav state on new grounds. Maček's activity made it possible for Radić to return to the country. Once back, however, Radić immediately incited a pro-Bolshevik campaign in Zagreb of such proportions that the Serbian military caste and crown were seriously alarmed by it. He was arrested, the government that was trying to produce reforms was compromised, and new elections became necessary in February 1925. These were a success for the Croatian Peasant Party and King Alexander had to start negotiations with Radić. Confident that a deep state reform would follow, the obstinate Croatian leader accepted to acknowledge "the Karađorđević dynasty, national unity, and the existing political order, while hoping for a revision of the constitution based on an agreement between Serbs, Croats and Slovenes."³ This led

3 Pirjevec, *Il giorno di San Vito*, 52 and 56.

to an understanding between Pašić and Radić, which in turn resulted in a Serbian–Croatian coalition government, with Pašić serving as president for the tenth time and Radić serving as the education minister. Yet the alliance between the two most important components of the kingdom was short-lived, and brought no state order reform. There was continued discontent in Croatia, and—right as the Serbian–Croatian coalition was being set up—tensions on religious grounds started worsening.

STATE AND CHURCHES

As for religion, according to a 1921 census, the Serbian Orthodox Church came in first with 5,600,000 members, while the Catholic Church was second with 4,735,000 worshippers; the Muslim community came in third with 1,337,000 people to its name, followed by old Christian, Jewish, and Protestant minorities.⁴ Catholics made up the majority of the population in the northern part of the kingdom, whereas Orthodox Christians were predominant in the central and southern parts. Formally, the state offered everyone freedom of religion, and respected the rights of all religious communities, but in fact it favored the Serbian Orthodox Church for embodying the “king’s religion.” The rights of the Catholic Church were supposed to be the object of an agreement with the Holy See. After starting in 1920, negotiations soon came to a standstill, however, and Belgrade seemed in no hurry to resume them. Management of the relations between the state and the churches was entrusted to the Ministry of Religion, firmly in the hands of the Orthodox; the Catholic episcopate had to submit to the decisions made by the central power.

Zagreb was a thriving center with a strong Catholic press, particularly thanks to the Jesuits and Franciscans. Also, the Croatian capital was home to a number of Catholic associations. The Catholic Youth

4 Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 50–53.

Federation had been active there since 1903, publishing an important journal—the aptly titled *Croatian Sentinel* (*Hrvatska Straža*).⁵ In the postwar years, the Catholic Action movement gained momentum, and the Croatian Eagles (*Hrvatski Orlovi*) youth sports association was born. The latter counted 30,000 members between boys and girls (*orli* and *orlice*, respectively) and published three magazines. The association's regulation prescribed mandatory communion, spiritual exercises, summer study and work camps, and impeccable uniforms to be worn on all public occasions. Even the correspondent of the prestigious Jesuit journal *La Civiltà Cattolica* detected “a military quality about [this association's] discipline.”⁶

From within these circles, a massive press campaign was launched to mobilize Croatia's nearly three million Catholics against the central government's measures penalizing Saint Peter's apostolate. First of all, its inequality of treatment was denounced: “the budget for religion totals 141 million dinars, 70 of which go to the Serbian Church and 34 to the Catholic one. [...] Pašić's government is kind in Serbia, where each citizen pays 55 dinars in yearly taxes, while it is cruel in Croatia and Slovenia, largely Catholic districts, where each citizen pays 165 dinars in taxes.” Another sore point involved government propaganda aimed at converting Catholics to Serbian Orthodoxy: “On the Dalmatian island of Vis, the Radical Party exploited the agrarian question and the population's poverty to persuade 200 peasants to convert by promising them material advantages. [...] In Strumica, civil authorities threaten to expel all Catholics, twenty-one families, from their homes, and to send them on the other side of the Bulgarian border if they do not turn to Orthodoxy promptly.” In addition to Serbian governors, the Croatian education minister Stjepan Radić was also charged with being among the people most responsible for this “persecution of the Catholic Church.” During a budget meeting, Radić had cast aspersions “on

5 Draganović, *Croazia Sacra*, 185.

6 *La Civiltà Cattolica* III (1928): 472, *Corrispondenza dalla Jugoslavia* (not signed).

the Friars Minor of Bosnia-Herzegovina, calling them parasites and insincere people who stupefy the masses,” and had canceled the one million dinar subsidy to their gymnasium in Široki Brijeg, even threatening to close it down.⁷ But, more than in his capacity as education minister, the “mason” Radić was feared for being a pro-Soviet agitator and promoter of the agrarian reform, which entailed the confiscation of many of the Catholic Church’s estates and properties. In December 1925, Monsignor Bauer, the archbishop of Zagreb and primate of Croatia, went to Belgrade with a delegation of high ecclesiastics to present King Alexander and the government with a memorandum on “all matters concerning religious persecution, education, stipends, the agrarian question, and so forth.” The king and government did not receive the representatives of the Catholic episcopate. Once back in Zagreb, the latter denounced the central authority’s deafness by issuing a document that was broadly circulated by the Catholic press.⁸

THE CROATIAN PARTY OF RIGHTS AND ITALY

Even more than it had under the Habsburg, the Croatian Party of Rights struggled for an independent Croatian state under the Serbian crown of Karadorđević. But while it had enjoyed wide support in the late 1800s, it dwindled into a sectarian party far removed from the masses after the Great War. It attracted exponents of the old landed aristocracy, former officers of the empire, the ultranationalist wing of Zagreb’s bourgeoisie, and a pugnacious minority of intellectuals and university students. These people drew inspiration from Milan Šufflay, a historian and writer born to an aristocratic family, who maintained that between Croats and Serbs there existed “an abyss created centuries ago,” before which stood the Croatian nation, “one of the most impor-

7 Ibid. II (1926): 281–83, *Corrispondenza dalla Jugoslavia* (not signed).

8 Ibid. III (1927): 283, *Corrispondenza dalla Jugoslavia* (not signed), and II (1926): 279–80, *Corrispondenza dalla Jugoslavia* (not signed).

tant bulwarks of Western civilization.”⁹ Ivica Frank, in exile in Budapest, was the party president; Baron Stjepan Sarkotić, a former general of the Austro-Hungarian army who had sought asylum in Vienna, was another charismatic figure; the lawyer Ante Pavelić, who had remained in the country to lead the party, was the third man in command. Ivica Frank—who had already come to an agreement with D’Annunzio’s men right after the end of the Great War—signed a new “convention” with the “honorable Grandi, on behalf of the Italian Fascist Party, and Lieutenant Vighi, on behalf of D’Annunzio’s Legionaries,” in November 1922, in Vienna, in which “he recognized the legitimacy of Italian rights over Fiume” in exchange for Italian support “of Croatian aspirations for independence.”¹⁰

After the Treaty of Rome was signed in January 1924, tensions with Yugoslavia seemed to ease up in a new climate of friendship and cordial collaboration. Foreign Affairs Secretary Salvatore Contarini, who carried on Count Sforza’s conciliatory politics and was the mind behind the Treaty of Rome, became the leading figure of Italian diplomacy. To Contarini’s way of thinking, only friendly relations with Yugoslavia could “crystallize Central Europe’s postwar order and effectively prevent the resurgence of Habsburg ambitions.” This line of thinking, however, displeased those nationalists who, in 1923, had enrolled in the National Fascist Party, securing important positions for themselves. These men placed Italy’s “territorial aspirations on Dalmatia and the Adriatic islands” front and center, and claimed it was preferable “to have a number of small states on the frontier, rather than a single strong state, as Yugoslavia had the potential of becoming.”¹¹ Mussolini, who also served as the country’s foreign affairs minister, supported Contarini’s pro-Yugoslav policy for some time. Still, even as he did so, he secretly continued to fuel the ambitions of Italian nationalists.

⁹ Draganović, *Croazia Sacra*, 24.

¹⁰ DDI, 7th series, vol. 1, doc. 175, 113.

¹¹ Di Nolfo, *Mussolini e la politica estera italiana*, 165–66.

In September 1924, only eight months after the Treaty of Rome was signed, the commander of the Royal Navy and secretary of the Dalmatia National Association, Umberto Roncagli, addressed the following words to Mussolini: “In order to carry on with the secret political work Your Excellency has deemed most useful, we must institute—as I’ve already had the honor of suggesting—a covert Balkan–Danubian committee, with representatives from all revolutionary movements not bound to Russian Bolshevism, to be placed at the center of a secret international organization aimed at counterbalancing Serbia’s imperialist policy, as well as the policy of those powers that support Serbia.”¹² Roncagli’s plan involved a secret directorate made up of three Italians “under cover of the Dalmatia National Association,” which in turn would guide a secret Balkan–Danubian committee made up of representatives from “the internal Macedonian revolutionary committee, the Albanian committee of Kossovo, rebel Montenegrins, and the Croatian revolutionary movement led by General Sarkotić in Vienna.”¹³

MUSSOLINI, GRANDI, AND BADOGLIO

After consolidating his power within the country, in 1925 Mussolini decided to set his foreign policy on a “more dynamic and aggressive” course.¹⁴ His first move was to appoint Grandi—one of the founders of fascism in Emilia-Romagna—as foreign affairs undersecretary. Dino Grandi, who would later become the second man in command of Italian foreign policy, set in motion the process by which the department was made fascist, and in a year’s time Contarini was forced to resign. Grandi’s challenge was to turn Fascist Italy into the country keeping the balance in Europe. To lead Italy into the group of major powers, the country had to be enlarged and strengthened by any means necessary. To Grandi’s way of thinking, diplomacy was “simply the art by

¹² DDI, 7th series, vol. 3, doc. 517, 309–10.

¹³ DDI, 7th series, vol. 3, doc. 517, 310.

¹⁴ Carocci, *La politica estera fascista*, v.

which the enemy is tricked, and conditions are prepared abroad, that is, among enemies, to wage war against them.” Thus, it was necessary “to resort to diplomacy and intrigue, to apply Machiavelli’s teachings a little more liberally than we have so far.”¹⁵ The unscrupulous exploitation of Croatian and Macedonian separatism against King Alexander I was a constant of Grandi’s diplomacy in his seven years as foreign affairs undersecretary and, later, minister.

Another sign of this new course was General Pietro Badoglio’s rise to the top of the military apparatus. In April 1925, Mussolini entrusted him with the direct command of the army and with the task of coordinating all the armed forces “for the country’s defense.” While no neighboring country was threatening Italy’s “sacred borders,” Badoglio started preparing for a two-sided war with Mussolini’s backing. In Badoglio’s estimation, this war would require nineteen divisions “to form a strong defensive barrier against France,” and an additional ten divisions “to develop an offensive against Yugoslavia.” The aim was to strike out at Yugoslavia and fend off France’s counterattack. The aggression was supposed to be lightning quick: “Excellence,” Badoglio wrote to Mussolini, “Be assured that the plan I am implementing for a possible action against the SHS [the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes] is grounded in the idea of dealing a powerful blow from the first days.”¹⁶

Much as he had been the right man for Sonnino’s expansionist politics at the end of the Great War, Badoglio was the right man for Mussolini’s ambitions now. But the Piedmontese general, a trusted aide to Victor Emmanuel III, carried out his work in full accord with the Savoy king as well. In effect, Badoglio was the military arm of an imperialist policy that Fascism inherited from the country’s national past.

At the end of 1925, Mussolini proclaimed his faith in the Italian people, “who today start gaining their material and moral position in

¹⁵ Quoted, in Italian, in De Felice, *Mussolini il duce*, I, 378–80.

¹⁶ Pieri and Rochat, *Pietro Badoglio Maresciallo d'Italia*, 358–60. Badoglio renewed and strengthened the intelligence apparatus, which became the Military Intelligence Service (Servizio Informazioni Militari, SIM). Further, he placed it under the chief of staff’s direct control—that is, under his own control, for Badoglio held that office between 1925 and 1940.

the world, a position they are able to expand to fit their increased and increasing power.”¹⁷ This new power politics followed the expected course of action—namely, colonial expansion in Africa and penetration in the Balkans, a forced route to Middle Eastern oil and the Danubian area. Rome immediately butted heads with Belgrade over control of Albania. King Alexander proposed a pact with Italy and France to ensure the status quo in the entire region. The Duce rejected it, however, and in November 1926, with the Treaty of Tirana, effectively turned Albania into an Italian protectorate, planting “a thorn in the side of the Yugoslav state.” Mussolini then proceeded to start negotiations with Hungary, the country most penalized by the treaties of Versailles, offering Hungarian revisionism political support on the international stage. In return, Italy hoped to open the Danubian area to its economy, in competition with Germany’s, and to use Hungary as “another bridgehead, together with Albania, to keep the Yugoslav state under constant pressure.”¹⁸

PAVELIĆ’S VISIT TO ROME

Early in June 1927, Ivica Frank had a memorial delivered to Mussolini. This document provided an account of “Croats’ true sentiments, and their intended aim.” With a certain emphasis, Frank maintained that he could count on “the entire intellectual class of his country, [...] almost all of the urban population in Croatian regions, [and] a considerable part of the rural population.”¹⁹ The future Croatian state would include all the regions once governed by the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, where the Croatian population was “in preponderant majority,” that is, Croatia, Slovenia, Dalmatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The new state would have a privileged relationship with Hungary, and even more so with Italy. Croats, Frank continued, were “prepared to adapt to

¹⁷ Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, vol. XXII, 66–67.

¹⁸ Carocci, *La politica estera fascista*, 39 and 79.

¹⁹ DDI, 7th series, vol. 5, 303.

the circle of Italian interests,” and committed to acknowledging “without reservations Italy’s right to supremacy in the Adriatic,” both political and military. “In order to meet the needs of its exceedingly populated country,” Italy was further awarded the right to benefit “from the rich resources of the Balkans in peaceful exchange for its industrial goods,” as well as the right “to assert, as it inevitably would have to do, its mighty influence in terms of civilization, and in the realm of culture.”²⁰

On 21 June, Pavelić went to Paris as Zagreb’s representative at the European Congress of Cities. On the same day, Baron Sarkotić met with the military attaché in the Italian embassy in Vienna, Colonel Carlo Vecchiarelli, to tell him that Ante Pavelić intended to stop in Rome on his way back from Paris, and that he wanted to have a meeting “with a leading member of the National Fascist Party.”²¹ Mussolini and Grandi decided Pavelić should meet with a trusted man who was extraneous to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The chosen person was Roberto Forges Davanzati, an authoritative fascist hailing from the ranks of the most intense nationalism, a journalist very close to Mussolini himself, and, after October 1926, the chief editor of the *Tribuna*, “the government’s unofficial organ for foreign policy.”²²

Pavelić stopped in Rome on 25 and 26 June 1927, and Forges Davanzati received him at his house twice. The Croat had a copy of Frank’s memorial, which he presented to his host. Reporting back to Grandi and Mussolini, Forges wrote that “Pavelić only added that the party’s action is covert and cautious out of necessity, but does not avail itself of a secret organization; for the time being, in order to start fighting against Serbian centralism and carry out legal resistance, the party acts in accord with dissident Radicists and with the group of federalist nationalists led by Doctor Trumbić.” Forges further commented: “they view Serbian power as being strong and ruthless, so it makes sense

²⁰ DDI, 7th series, vol. 5, doc. 313, 303–5.

²¹ DDI, 7th series, vol. 5, doc. 286, 280.

²² Carocci, *La politica estera fascista*, 30.

that they count on an Italian–Yugoslav conflict to attain what they are hopeless to secure through their own resources or by means of an internal crisis.” Pavelić was sure that if Croatia was “certain of achieving independence,” it would favor Italian arms and hinder Alexander’s military defense, with “Croats deserting the army to the greatest extent possible.” Finally, Pavelić got to the heart of his requests: Serbian propaganda was trying to convince Croats that, in the event of a war, Italy would seize Dalmatia, at the very least, and that therefore the only way to safeguard Croatian integrity was through the unity of Yugoslavia; to disprove this propaganda, the Party of Rights needed “unofficial statements and demonstrations pointing to the fact that Italy has no anti-Croatian territorial aims.”²³ Forges suggested to Grandi and Mussolini that they accept Pavelić’s requests. Reassuring words about Dalmatia could be leaked to the press, while cultural propaganda could be organized in Zagreb, in the form of concerts, conferences and shows.

PAVELIĆ AND THE SKUPŠTINA

The Serbian–Croatian coalition government inaugurated by Pašić and Radić in 1925 was over in a year—not only because the former’s pan-Serbian obstinacy and the latter’s autonomist claims were irreconcilable, but perhaps more importantly because the king and military caste plotted against, and were prepared to demolish, any governmental grouping that might attempt to escape their control in the least. When the alliance between Pašić and Radić ended, so did the last hopes of Serbs and Croats ever seeing eye to eye. A period of great political instability followed, which “manifested itself in the form of five government crises in 1926, and in a whirlwind of intrigue, controversy, and scandal.” At the end of the year, Pašić—now in his eighties—made a last attempt to return to power, but King Alexander stopped him curtly, and the old lion did not survive the humiliation. His death

23 DDI, 7th series, vol. 5, doc. 324, 317–18.

brought on a succession war in the Serbian Radical Party, which favored the birth of a political grouping that cut across party lines, made up of Serbian radicals and democrats, subjected to the king and military. As an acute Serbian politician would comment some time later, “the Skupština became a circus, the government a comedy, the state a mental institution.”²⁴

In the 1927 elections, Radić's party earned 381,000 votes and sixty-three representatives, while Pribičević's party was voted by 202,000 people and secured twenty-three representatives. Trumbić's Federalist Party and the Party of Rights, which Pavelić now presided, ran jointly in the Croatian Bloc, earning 48,600 votes and two seats, one per leader.²⁵ Among other things, these figures prove just how slim the support was for Pavelić and Trumbić, contrasted with the one enjoyed by the two main Croatian parties. Determined to oppose Serbian hegemony by any means necessary, the Croatian members of parliament closed ranks to expose the court's plots and the Serbian governors' misappropriations, demanding equal rights for all Yugoslav citizens. Pavelić was the most uncompromising. During the Skupština session of 28 October 1927, he said that the Croatian Bloc would use “all legal means to modify the status of the Croatian people, with an eye to setting up an independent Croatian state.”²⁶

Pavelić's prestige spiked in December, when he appeared in Skopje in his capacity as a lawyer to defend twenty students accused of belonging to a Macedonian separatist organization. The Serbian police had pressured the accused in a number of ways, even resorting to torture to coerce them into providing false accounts of the events. Pavelić encouraged them to speak out, and turned the trial into an indictment of the abuse of power perpetrated by the Macedonian police. The Italian ambassador in Belgrade, Alessandro Bodredo, addressed the following words to Mussolini: “The Serbian public opinion itself was impressed

²⁴ Pirjevec, *Il giorno di San Vito*, 59 and 62.

²⁵ Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i ustaše*, 18.

²⁶ Dolbeau, *Ante Pavelić 1889–1959*, 4.

by the firm statements of the accused, perceived as veritable martyrs of the Macedonian national idea.” In the same telegram, Bodrero invited Mussolini to remain on the path taken “to create currents favorable to Italy in Croatia,” and to hasten “the purchase of an important press organ and the establishment of a banking institution.”²⁷ A few months later, the Banca Commerciale Italiana secured the majority of shares of the Hrvatska Banka (the Croatian Bank) and of the editorial group that published *Novosti*, one of Zagreb’s most important daily newspapers, until then aligned with Belgrade.²⁸

ACTION BY MACEDONIAN SEPARATISM

The most combative faction within the Macedonian separatist movement was the VRMO (Vnatrešna Makedonska Revolucionerna Organizacija), better known as the IMRO (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization). The IMRO’s leader was Alexander Protogerov, an old general of the Bulgarian army and a historical figure within the Macedonian liberation movement. Though he supported guerrilla warfare, Protogerov was not opposed to the plan set forth in Paris of a federation or fusion between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, because he believed that by this means “the Macedonian problem would find a peaceful resolution, too.”²⁹ That plan was close to King Alexander’s heart as well, for he aspired to a Greater Yugoslavia made up of all South Slav lands, from the Adriatic to the Black Sea. Unlike Protogerov, the young Ivan “Vance” Mihailov, another prominent IMRO leader, regarded Serbs solely as the enemy to be defeated to restore Macedonia’s national integrity. As a result, Mihailov looked to Rome, the camp most opposed to the idea of a Greater Yugoslavia.

In September 1927, Mussolini summoned Naum Tomalewski, an IMRO leader responsible for foreign relations, to Rome, and made

²⁷ DDI, 7th series, vol. 5, doc. 679, 618–19.

²⁸ Carocci, *La politica estera fascista*, 174–75, notes included.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 90.

him meet with Dino Grandi, who gave him conspicuous support and reassured him at length of “Fascism’s lively interest in the Macedonian cause.”³⁰ With the funds and weapons that Italy provided, the IMRO was able to increase its offensive. Between the autumn of 1927 and the summer of 1928, it successfully carried out a series of terrorist attacks against judges and functionaries in Belgrade, a Serbian general and “the head of the Yugoslav secret services,” who was struck “in the very headquarters of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.”³¹ Yugoslavia closed its borders with Bulgaria, where the IMRO had its bases, and exploited the trials against the attackers, or alleged attackers, to launch a press campaign against Italy, accused of favoring Macedonian terrorism with both weapons and funds.

Meanwhile, General Protogerov and Vance Mihailov were at daggers drawn. Protogerov maintained that there was a need to “organize the revolt within Macedonia, among the masses subjected to the Serbian gendarmerie.” In contrast, Vance believed the revolt in Macedonia should be prepared on Bulgarian soil, so as to “better prepare the *comitagi* and proceed with an invasion at the most opportune time.” Failing to come to an understanding, Protogerov and Mihailov decided to submit their respective proposals to the congress of representatives from all the Macedonian districts. But on the eve of the congress, Mihailov’s assassins “put [Protogerov] down like a dog” in the center of Sofia. According to Tomalewski, Mihailov had enjoyed the support of the Bulgarian war minister, Volkov, and seized the organization’s funds. Though the IMRO considered Vance’s action insane, it had to attempt reconciliation to avoid breaking up.³²

³⁰ DDI, 7th series, vol. 5, doc. 434, 419.

³¹ Pirjevec, *Il giorno di San Vito*, 76.

³² DDI, 7th series, vol. 6, doc. 587, 515–16. The *comitagi* were Macedonian armed bands. On 22 August 1928, the Yugoslav police alerted the Parisian Sureté: “The Macedonian committee will supposedly send two groups of conspirators, one to Belgrade and one to Paris, to assassinate King Alexander and the president of the Republic,” Gaston Doumergue, a dear friend of Yugoslavia. (AMAE, Série Contrôle des étrangers 1915–1940, Supplément, vol. 131, dossier 1, 3).

On 24 August, Tomalewski had a new meeting with Grandi. In rural areas, farmers were in a state of unrest and it seemed as if a mass revolt might explode at any minute. Six IMRO leaders were prepared to set off and “speak the word of faith among Macedonians,” making all necessary arrangements so that “if the hour of revolt should come, everything would be in place.” The next day, Grandi wrote to Mussolini: “[W]e are working on the plan to get IMRO leaders into Yugoslavia by way of Brindisi-Coritza. [...] Furthermore, without Albanians’ knowledge, the necessary weapons will be taken to a village near Coritza, where a small deposit will be set up.” Tomalewski also asked Grandi for two million Italian lire for “the immediate needs of the operation.” Grandi played for time, however. Before he loosened the purse strings, he wanted to have “solid grounds on which to evaluate whether Mihailov’s faction or the old Macedonian committee was going to win.”³³

THE SKUPŠTINA KILLINGS

One of the arguments Radić and Pavelić often raised against Serbian power was the government’s inequality of taxation, which harmed Croats, Slovenes, and Bosnian Muslims (or Bosniaks) much to the advantage of Serbs. To blunt the opposition, in February 1928, King Alexander had introduced fiscal equality and brought the Yugoslav Muslim Organization (that is to say, Bosnian Muslims) into government, alongside Serbian democrats and radicals. Croatian members of parliament, though, continued to denounce the court’s plots and demand a democratic government. The atmosphere became charged in the hall of the Skupština, where there were those who responded to Croatian obstructionism with open death threats, particularly against Radić and the Croatian Serb Pribićević, viewed as a traitor. Finally, during the session of 20 June 1928, the situation was precipitated into tragedy. After a violent altercation with some Croatian members of parliament,

33 DDI, 7th series, vol. 6, doc. 587, 517 and 519.

the Montenegrin radical Puniša Račić pulled out a gun and fired five shots: he killed two Croatian representatives, Djuro Basariček and Stjepan Radić's nephew Pavle, injured two more, Ivan Pernar and Ivan Grandja, and fired his last shot at Stjepan Radić himself. The old leader, who was nearly blind, had not taken part in the argument and had stayed still in his place. Seriously injured in the abdomen, Radić was carried to the hospital. That same evening King Alexander paid him a visit, but this gesture was not enough to placate the anger of the Croatian representatives, all of whom left Belgrade.

King Alexander forced the government in power to resign, and formed another with the same parties, placing the presidency of the council in the hands of the Slovenian reverend Anton Korošec, "a politician of remarkable abilities and experience," but who had a terrible reputation for being a schemer, so much so that he was suspected of being implicated "in the fall of each cabinet he was ever a part of."³⁴ It was the first time a non-Serb was entrusted with the highest government office; that he was a Catholic prelate contributed to ease tensions on the religious plane, but it did not repair the rift with Croatian representatives, who continued to desert the Skupština.

Thanks to a temporary improvement in his health, Radić was transferred to a hospital in Zagreb. A few days later, he made the following statement: "I no longer want anything to do with Serbs. [...] [W]e shall seek recognition as an independent state, and, as far as Italy is concerned, I will help find a suitable compromise." The new Italian ambassador in Belgrade, Carlo Galli, wrote to Mussolini: "An independent Croatia and a compromise with Italy: here are two concepts representing the complete reversal of Radić's entire political ideology, which up until yesterday was all about [setting up] a federation of peasants from the Adriatic to the Black Sea to stand up to Italy's bullying." It was of the utmost importance that Italy step in, Galli continued, both to support the Croatian movement and favor one future leader over another,

³⁴ Pirjevec, *Il giorno di San Vito*, 66.

and to contain the Serbian counterattack and any retaliation by France and the countries of the Little Entente, since “the complete detachment of Croatia would be a disaster for the construction of Versailles.” Galli then got to the heart of the matter: “[I]t seems to me that the fundamental concept is that anything that may serve the purpose of breaking up or maiming the Yugoslav state should be executed. [...] Certainly, if we could attain [...] an independent Croatia subjected to us politically and as relates to customs, confined in the sphere of the Italian Kingdom, with suitable agreements giving Hungary free access to the Adriatic ports, the Adriatic would conclusively have been turned into a *Mare nostrum*.”³⁵

Meanwhile, Radić’s conditions worsened and uncertainty about his fate paralyzed the Croatian coalition until he died on 8 August 1928. Three hundred thousand people turned the funeral of the most beloved Croatian politician into an imposing separatist demonstration. Radić’s heir apparent, Vladko Maček, then took up the leadership of the Peasant Party. Croatian members of parliament gathered in Zagreb in the ancient Croatian Diet, contested Korošec’s government claiming it represented neither “the Croatian Kingdom” nor other “nationalities,” including Montenegrins, and contended that they would continue to fight for a new order “that would ensure the equality of every nationality.”³⁶

THE CROATIAN PROGRAM

Around 20 August, Rochira met with Pavelić. The separatist leader was still worried about the matter of Dalmatia, because pro-Dalmatian demonstrations continued to take place in several Italian cities, and Serbs used this to their advantage as they persisted in anti-Italian propaganda. As a result, it was considered appropriate that articles should

³⁵ DDI, 7th series, vol. 6, doc. 522, 462–66.

³⁶ *La Civiltà Cattolica* III (1928): 375, *Cronaca/Jugoslavia* (not signed).

appear in “authoritative newspapers” reassuring Croats that Italy had no “aims of conquest on Dalmatia.” Rochira asked Pavelić whether the Croatian coalition would be willing to return to Belgrade. The latter answered in the affirmative, but “only on the condition that Croatia’s independence and a merely personal union with the king be accepted. Today, leaders of the separatist, federalist and Radicist parties agreed on this point. After all, this is the program Radić passed on to his party.” As for an action program, the coalition had already elected a managing and executive committee, but the debate that had started after Radić’s death was still in progress, and it was not easy to make decisions. “Violent action,” which would cause needless bloodshed, was nevertheless ruled out. “We know that Italy,” Pavelić concluded, “looks kindly on our cause; but [...] to what extent is it willing to help us politically and diplomatically? It goes without saying that the answer to these questions would influence our methods of struggle and our entire action.”³⁷

In mid-September, the Croatian coalition presented two appeals before Berlin’s Interparliamentary Conference and the League of Nations Assembly, in which it contested the Yugoslav delegations’ right to represent the Croatian people. Mussolini took his cue from this and sent a confidential note to all the Italian ambassadors, which was “to be destroyed after it was read.” The tragedy that had taken place in the Skupština, the Duce wrote, resulted from a decade of Serbian dominance over the Yugoslav Kingdom. The conflict “between the Croatian people, Western, endowed with an ancient civilization and with material wealth, and the Serbian people, Balkan and East-facing, was fatal.” The matter “of the defense of the existence and independence of the Croatian people” had been raised before the world’s public opinion “in peaceful and legal forms, but in precise and unequivocal terms.” When the time was right, the Italian government intended to take sides in favor of recognizing Croatia’s rights. In so doing, Mussolini

³⁷ DDI, 7th series, vol. 6, doc. 567, 498.

went on to say, his government would express the “unanimous” feelings of the “generous Italian people.” Confronted with Zagreb’s pleas, Italians had forgotten “past and present disagreements.” Remembering their own “martyrdom,” Italians felt sympathetic toward a people who fought for the same victory they too had attained at the cost of tremendous sacrifice. Keeping this “tendency of the Italian people” in mind, the diplomatic body was to persuade all those who favored peace and the legitimate aspirations of civil peoples to understand and support the Croatian cause.³⁸

In reality, the Croatian coalition lacked the cohesion and homogeneity touted by Mussolini. The only party that looked to Rome unequivocally was Pavelić’s. Trumbić was still keen on the idea of federalism and wavered between Rome, London and Paris. Radicists were still in the picture, and the leader of the Democratic Party that represented the Serbs of Croatia was totally averse to Rome. Pribićević believed that Italy was “putting an iron circle around Yugoslavia,” which only the union between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria could break, allowing for them to “become a great power [...] able to fulfill the principle of the Balkans to the Balkan peoples.”³⁹ Reiterating the idea long cultivated by Radić, Pribićević aimed at a great rural democracy able to reduce Serbian dominance and oppose Italian imperialism.

Nevertheless, the action of Croatian separatists directed toward the outside world was intensifying. Mussolini received a memorial from Budapest attributed to “Professor Šufflay, Maček’s adviser.” The coalition, which could count on eighty-eight representatives, had agreed on a common platform, including “the boycott of the bloody Skupština” and the return to Belgrade “only in the event that a government above parties announced free elections,” so that “effective equality of rights among citizens” might be ensured. The differences of opinion between the coalition’s parties did not go unmentioned. Pribićević was a “Ser-

³⁸ DDI, 7th series, vol. 6, doc. 658, 573–74.

³⁹ DDI, 7th series, vol. 7, doc. 2, 1 and 3.

bian patriot” who intended to “salvage Yugoslavia.” Yet Belgrade had branded him a “traitor of the Serbian idea.” As a result, if Croatia and Serbia ever separated, he would likely opt to stay in Zagreb, for he would be precluded from any kind of activity in Belgrade. All of the other parties favored Croatia’s secession, albeit with some tactical differences: the Peasant Party and the Federalist Party wanted to practice passive resistance to paralyze public life and force Belgrade to bring about the split, whereas the Party of Rights would have been happy to effect the detachment first hand. As for the constructive phase of the process, separatists asked Italy to commit to: 1) continuing the press campaign casting Croats as the “advanced guard of Western culture”; 2) supporting Zagreb’s rights before the League of Nations “if Belgrade should take up arms”; 3) alleviating the “serious financial difficulties” of the separatist press; 4) providing “financial means” with which to dispatch “agitators to villages,” who would expedite the course of the action; 5) granting “material means” to the Blue Shirts, who were destined to become “the armed force of the new state.” In exchange for this, the coalition was prepared to submit to the memorial Frank had sent Mussolini the year before, and it reiterated Croatia’s wish to “participate fully in Italy’s sphere of interests.”⁴⁰

In the same days, the consul, Rochira, met with Maček in Zagreb and questioned him on the Peasant Party’s leanings. Maček answered that his party’s aim was an “independent and separate” Croatia, and that if Belgrade had proposed to set up a federation or a personal union, he would have accepted it, “viewing it as a step toward separation, however.” Maček was convinced that the kingdom was increasingly weak, on the brink of economic ruin for lack of foreign credit. The coalition expected to be able to announce Croatia’s independence in two or three months, with a ceremony in Zagreb’s parliament (the Sabor) and a sol-

⁴⁰ DDI, 7th series, vol. 7, doc. 45, 40–42. Organized by Pavelić and Perčec, Blue Shirts were the paramilitary youth groups of the Party of Rights. Many adherents came from the ranks of a “sports” association eloquently called *Hrvatski Domobran* (The Croatian Soldier, which Pavelić founded in Zagreb after Radić’s death).

em popular demonstration. Belgrade would then react in one of three ways. It might arrest Croatian representatives in mass, use the army and police with great bloodshed, or ignore the event (or otherwise play it down by way of ridicule). Maček realized that counting on pro-Serbian France would be pointless, but wanted to explore the possibility of an agreement between Italy and Great Britain concerning their intervention, “particularly to prevent a massacre of defenseless people and in the interest of European peace.”⁴¹

THE SECRET COMMITTEE AND THE SUPPLY OF WEAPONS

During a visit to Rome in November 1928, Ambassador Galli proposed setting up a secret committee to manage Italy’s relations with Croatian separatists, relieving the consul, Rochira, of this dangerous task. He believed that Croats’ pro-Italian stance was purely tactical and instrumental and feared that a “sudden change in the circumstances” might push them “to sell everything in their possession.” If the government of Belgrade had acquired evidence of Mussolini’s direct aid to separatists, particularly in the form of money, this could be used to trigger a serious international incident. Mussolini agreed with Galli on this, and put Fulvio Suvich of Trieste, the finance undersecretary and an excellent diplomat, in charge of “active contacts.”⁴²

On his way back to Belgrade, Galli stopped in Trieste and had a long talk with Suvich, with whom he was on excellent terms. Suvich said he was favorable to forming a secret committee, and that it would not be difficult for him to gather up “four or five persons of firm patriotism offering every assurance of secrecy and discretion.” Among those

⁴¹ DDI, 7th series, vol. 7, doc. 46, 42–43.

⁴² DDI, 7th series, vol. 7, doc. 60, 65–66. An irredentist volunteer in World War I, and later a lawyer and a manager of the *Adriatica Sicurtà* of Trieste, Fulvio Suvich had been elected a member of parliament in 1921 with the National Bloc. He had adhered to Fascism and, due to his expertise in finance, had been appointed as undersecretary of the pertinent ministry. The Italian delegate in the League of Nations, he presided over the Committee of Control set up to supervise the Austrian economy.

who had already tackled the issue of Croatian separatism “with great mastery and accomplishment,” there was, for example, “Major Finzi,” who had proven “diabolic shrewdness and unquestionable ability.” In any case, it was deemed necessary to spur separatists and aid them in establishing a committee abroad, which was considered the most effective way “to get help into Croatia, compromising our own position as little as possible.” Meanwhile, work could start with the Croatian committee set up in Vienna, led by General Sarkotić.⁴³ The task of keeping contacts with Sarkotić was entrusted to the journalist Eugenio Morreale, the Vienna correspondent for *Popolo d'Italia* and one of Mussolini's trusted men.

On an evening in November 1928, a squad of the border militia stopped a car from Gorizia with five people in it on the Italian–Slovenian border, and found that it carried 12,000 9 mm-caliber cartridges. The driver feigned surprise, and the four passengers, who belonged to the Slav minority, likewise professed complete ignorance. But one of them, Leopoldo Kemperle, was an editor for a periodical of the Slovenian Catholic Party and was known to be an “active irredentist agitator.” The militia arrested the five men on charges of complicity in an attempt against the safety of the state, and news of this caused quite a sensation. Italian newspapers targeted Slav terrorism, while the Yugoslav press reacted by accusing Italy of mounting a shameful and unfounded police case against the nationalism of minorities. A few days later, Giannino Angelini showed up before the prefect of Gorizia bearing a confidential letter by the prefect of Trieste, which introduced him as an honest merchant of weapons and ammunitions. Angelini, the owner of A&B, an ancient weapons and ammunitions company based in Trieste, explained that the cartridges were being sent clandestinely to a company in Ljubljana, that this occurred “with the full knowledge of the Italian military authorities, and that the smuggling [was]

43 Ibid., 67. The committee's military division was entrusted to Colonel Stevo Duić, who, according to Galli, was known to be “anti-Italian.” The press and propaganda divisions were in the hands of the journalist Ivan Perčević.

two years in progress.” The gunsmith further indicated that he reported to Commander Soldati of the general staff of the Royal Navy. Questioned with due discretion, the commander confirmed that “Angelini [had] long been smuggling arms destined to Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Hungary, with the implicit consent of the Italian military authorities.” The prefect of Gorizia suspended his investigations, reduced the charges against the five men to mere smuggling, and released them.⁴⁴

The trust placed in the gunsmith Angelini by the general staff under Badoglio was well deserved. During the Great War, the then-lieutenant Giannino Angelini gained distinction as the liaison officer of the Third Army’s Intelligence Service. Following the occupation of Trieste, he transferred to the ITO of the Governorate of Julian Venetia. He then worked for Colonel Finzi in Budapest, and carried out “special activities” in Croatia, which led him to “foster contacts and relations with several leading members of the Croatian movement.”⁴⁵

A little over a month after the ammunition was confiscated, Italy stumbled on another and far more serious incident. On the Austro-Hungarian border at Szentgotthárd, the Austrian police intercepted a load of weapons originating in Italy and headed for Hungary. Protests against this illegal supply of weapons arose within the League of Nations, and the head of the Czechoslovakian government, Edvard Beneš, circulated rumors to the effect that, “based on the intelligence at his disposal, it was the eighth delivery headed for Hungary.”⁴⁶ The process of providing Hungary with arms had in fact been taking place for some time, for, according to Mussolini’s strategy, Hungary’s rearmament would contribute to the encirclement of Yugoslavia. To avoid further incidents, Count István Bethlen, the head of the Hungarian government, and the Italian ambassador in Budapest, Durini di Monza, started working on “other projects” by which to get weapons into

44 “Relazione dell’ispettore generale Giuseppe Console al capo della polizia, 15 dicembre 1928” (Report from General Inspector Giuseppe Console to the head of the police), in Canosa, *I servizi segreti del duce*, 210.

45 Ibid., 211. Letter attached to the cited report to the head of the police.

46 DDI, 7th series, vol. 6, doc. 24, 17.

Hungary, both “heavy” war equipment and “more minute” arms, like “rifles, machine guns, etc.”⁴⁷

PAVELIĆ IN EXILE

On 1 December 1928, on the tenth anniversary of the kingdom’s founding, a great separatist demonstration was staged in Zagreb, during which bloody gunfights took place between the police and the paramilitary Blue Shirts youth group. Many students ended up in jail and two of Pavelić’s lieutenants, Gustav Perčec and Branko Jelić, fled to Budapest to escape capture. To reestablish order, the head of the government, Anton Korošec, gave in to the army’s pressure and appointed a Serbian official as *župan* (prefect) of the Zagreb region. There could have been no greater provocation. The unfortunate measure ushered in a new wave of protests throughout Croatia, persuaded Serbian Democrats to leave the government, and ultimately determined the collapse of Korošec’s cabinet. There had been twenty-five governments in a span of ten years, most of which had fallen because of courtly plotting, and even more so because of scheming on the part of the army.

At the end of December, King Alexander opened talks with all party leaders. On behalf of the Croatian coalition, Maček proposed transforming the state in a federation made up of seven units—Slovenia, Croatia, Vojvodina, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia, and Macedonia—each equipped with its own parliament and army. The leaders of the Serbian parties and the Slovene Korošec declared that they were opposed to modifying the constitution. On 5 January 1929, Maček met with the king again, and reduced his request to five units, leaving Macedonia to Serbia, and accepting the division of Bosnia-Herzegovina between Croatia and Serbia; but he made no other concessions. The king asked for time to think. According to Carlo Sforza’s account, Alexander was certain that, if he accepted dividing the old glorious Ser-

47 DDI, 7th series, vol. 6, doc. 73, 72.

bian army into five small autonomous ones, only one of which would remain Serbian, the military leaders “would suppress him.”⁴⁸ Fear of the military surely played a part, but in truth the sovereign had never expressed a preference for a federalist state before then. Whatever the reason, Alexander rejected Maček’s proposal and chose the path of dictatorship to safeguard the unity of the kingdom. On the night between 5 and 6 January 1929, the Serbian monarch drafted a manifesto abolishing the Vidovdan Constitution, and “declaring the time ripe for no intermediaries to be left between the people and king.”⁴⁹ Political parties were abolished, the press was subjected to censorship, and a special court for the defense of the state was instituted. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes changed its name to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The symbols of the three ancient nations were dropped, and their use was banned. The state was divided into ten provinces (*banovine*), held by an equal number of governors (*bani*). For the most part, these were Serbian generals who answered directly to the king on local administration and the keeping of order. Alexander’s dictatorship was relentless toward opponents, who were imprisoned, killed, or forced into exile. At the same time, however, the king set in motion policies to unify the land under the law, modernize infrastructures, and favor agriculture. This allowed an easing of anti-Serbian tensions, particularly in the Croatian countryside, and reduced the leeway of separatist propaganda. Rather than the ever-clandestine Macedonian resistance, it was the Croatian opposition that bore the brunt of this. The latter had predominantly followed legal routes, and now found itself cornered.

A few days after the advent of the dictatorship, the leaders of the Croatian opposition decided to create a political committee abroad to carry out propaganda, composed by two members of the Peasant Party, two members of the Federalist Party, and, finally, two separatists. They started selecting the right people for this post, but were running out

48 Sforza, *Jugoslavia*, 189.

49 Pirjevec, *Il giorno di San Vito*, 80.

of time, and—when they found out that Maček’s arrest was being discussed “very seriously” in Belgrade—decided that Pavelić “should immediately leave to arrange for the political emigration of some members of the directorate.” On the evening of 22 January, Pavelić left Zagreb, crossed the border at Fiume with a nearly expired passport, and reached Vienna. In anticipation of other expatriations from Croatia, Mussolini made sure that the prefects of Fiume, Gorizia, Trieste, and Zara were alerted, so they might facilitate by every means possible “Croatian political refugees’ entry and stay in the kingdom.” Further, the prefects were to inform the General Directorate of Public Security about each arrival and disclose “any useful piece of intelligence” on their activity and contacts.⁵⁰

In early February, Mussolini’s man Eugenio Morreale met with Pavelić. The latter was firmly convinced that the Croatian question, far from being buried and done with, would come “to a violent solution.” Yet when it came to addressing the coalition’s intentions, his answers were very vague.⁵¹ In a subsequent meeting with the other Croatian leaders, in Zagreb, Morreale ascertained that there was still no well-defined plan. Trumbić was “saddened and dejected”; Maček remained “firm on his positions,” but the Italian journalist doubted that he possessed “the great qualities of a mass leader.” Morreale’s skepticism was echoed by Galli’s pessimism. Croatian public opinion, which had sided with the Peasant Party up until 6 January, now faltered, “at least in large part pacified” by the reform policies of the dictatorial government, and “forged” by the intense antiseparatist propaganda of the Croatian financial and commercial groups the king had co-opted into the central government. According to Galli, if “sudden and unexpected events” had not occurred, in a short span of time the king would have been able to claim that “tranquility has returned to Croatia.”⁵²

⁵⁰ DDI, 7th series, vol. 7, doc. 209, 237.

⁵¹ DDI, 7th series, vol. 7, doc. 249, 274.

⁵² DDI, 7th series, vol. 7, doc. 286, 308.

Yet it was not so, because, when Pavelić arrived in Vienna, the most intransigent wing of Croatian separatism went into action. On 22 March 1929, Zagreb's most famous journalist was killed. The consul, Rochira, had announced his death to Mussolini two months before the fact: "The Croatian terrorist organization is preparing a new attack, allegedly against Tonisch, who is disliked."⁵³ Tonisch's real name was Antun Schlegel, also known as Toni, the editor of Zagreb's newspaper *Novosti*, of which the Banca Commerciale Italiana had become the main shareholder with the intent of gradually shifting its political leanings toward Italy. The murder provoked great indignation, even among the Croatian opposition, and Pavelić attributed its execution to assassins in Belgrade. In fact, Schlegel's murder had been organized in Vienna by Pavelić's military right-hand man, Gustav Perčec, and carried out by Zvonimir Pospisil, Mijo Babić, and others.⁵⁴ During the ensuing search for Schlegel's assassins, a police officer lost his life, and three more sustained serious injuries. When the police arrested three separatists belonging to Pavelić's network, another terrorist attack shook Zagreb. On the night between 5 and 6 August 1929, a large quantity of explosive was used to blow up the police station.

THE SOFIA AGREEMENTS

The trip to Bulgaria was an important political step for Pavelić. Traveling through Hungary and Romania, he arrived in Sofia on 20 April 1929, accompanied by Gustav Perčec. Pavelić had an Austrian passport, while Perčec traveled with a Bulgarian passport in the name of Tomoff. They had been sent by the Committee of the Macedonian Brotherhoods, an entity representing the legal associations of Macedonian émigrés in Bulgaria. At the station in Sofia, they were greeted

⁵³ DDI, 7th series, vol. 7, doc. 209, 237.

⁵⁴ Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i ustaše*, 69. The historian Mario Jareb claims instead that the idea of killing the journalist was shaped in Belgrade with the collaboration of a Croatian nationalist who was also an informant; according to this hypothesis, the homicide gave the police a pretext to liquidate the Croatian opposition (Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret*, 89).

by the president of the committee, Stanišev, and 3,000 relocated Macedonians, who accompanied them in procession to their hotel, flanked by a cheering crowd of Bulgarians. A banquet was held for 250 notables, among whom were several generals in the military reserve, former ministers, members of parliament, and intellectuals. Pavelić and Perčec took the floor asking Macedonians and Croats to join forces against the Serbs, with whom “any form of coexistence within a same state was impossible.” They also reminded the public before them that, “despite Serbian violence,” the Croatian youth was “fully organized, prepared, and faithful.”⁵⁵ The next day, the leaders of the Macedonian committee informed the press that the two countries’ representatives had decided to coordinate their actions so as to achieve the political freedom and full independence of both Croatia and Macedonia. The Committee of the Brotherhoods was a legal organization, everything happened in broad daylight, and the Bulgarian press placed a great deal of emphasis on the visit and on the agreement that was reached. More privately, Pavelić and Perčec met with Vance Mihailov in a residence near Sofia. The latter had taken the command of the IMRO after getting rid of General Protogerov. According to a Yugoslav informant in the Quai d’Orsay, the meeting with Mihailov ended with a pact of alliance and mutual support. Pavelić and Perčec would procure weapons and explosives for the IMRO, while Mihailov would provide his men for the guerrilla training of Croats and the execution of “high-level” operations.⁵⁶ “Pavelić’s trip to Sofia,” Galli wrote to Mussolini a few days later, “has dealt a blow to the dictatorial government, for it proves to Croats and Serbs that Croatian political exiles are active, and thus that the Croatian question is far from being on its way to resolution.”⁵⁷

55 DDI, 7th series, vol. 7, doc. 383, 392.

56 AMAE, Série Contrôle des étrangers, 3me partie, Supplément, vol. 125, 164.

57 DDI, 7th series, vol. 7, doc. 390, 398.

Under the Duce's Wing

PAVELIĆ IN ITALY

From Sofia, Pavelić and Perčec set out for Istanbul, where others close to the Croatian cause were waiting for them. Before crossing the frontier, however, they were contacted by the Macedonian Stanišev, who bore a telegram from Vienna urging them “immediately” to return to Austria “by sea” on an Italian steam ship about to weigh anchor from the Bulgarian port of Varna.¹ The two Croats boarded the steamer on 24 April 1929. Once in Italy, they remained there for a full month—a month shrouded in uncertainty, for we have no knowledge of where they went or of what they did during that time. According to Branko Miljus, a Serbian writer and politician, Pavelić met with Mussolini, and then resumed his journey “with 25 million lire and the promise of continued political and financial help.”² We have no proof that this meeting ever occurred, but, based on what happened soon after, there can be no doubt that far-reaching decisions were made during that month. The Yugoslav government had referred Pavelić to the special court on account of the claims the latter had made while in Sofia, and was exerting diplomatic pressure on Austrian authorities to obtain his expulsion from Austria. At the end of May, Pavelić returned to Vienna clandestinely, and quickly sorted out his business; at the beginning of June, he returned to Italy, accompanied by his wife and children. The Ital-

¹ DDI, 7th series, vol. 7, doc. 384, 393.

² Laurière, *Assassins au nom de Dieu*, 18.

ian authorities made a house available to him in Livorno and provided him with an Italian passport in the name of Antonio Serdar—the first of a long series of aliases Pavelić would come to use in the following years.³ In Livorno, Pavelić was able to communicate with the secret service officers of the Royal Navy, present in the local naval academy. As for communication with his homeland, he could avail himself of the Bosnian friars who sojourned in the local Franciscan convent dedicated to the Madonna.

His brief trip to Vienna had also been spurred by political reasons. The agreement reached with Mihailov and the perspective of strong Italian support dictated that the strategy of struggle be redefined. Pavelić discussed this matter with Sarkotić and other representatives of the Croatian movement, and once back in Italy submitted a plan of action to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Pavelić's plan and the ministry's evaluations are described in a ministerial note dated 30 June 1929, recovered by chance, which reveals the following. Pavelić characterized the Croatian people as "unanimously separatist," yet "unprepared" for action; "wide-ranging organization, assignment, and armament of the Croatian masses" were necessary before a "decisive incident" could take place triggering popular insurrection. The crux of the plan—the decisive incident—was "King Alexander's murder," for which he counted on Vance Mihailov. Well aware of the fact that Italians could not give him their "direct and overt" support, Pavelić made four requests: 1) a loan to "subsidize" propaganda, the deployment of trusted men, the flight of Croats in the wake of terrorist attacks, and "the armed organization of Croatian forces"; 2) a supply of machine guns on the Italian or Hungarian border "when the time comes for action in grand style"; 3) the setting up of a "Friends of Croatia" association in Italy, so that the "common people of Croatia" might know that Italy was not an enemy; 4) the opening of "secret Italian–Croatian negotiations" on the future order of independent Croatia. The same ministerial note allows us

3 For the names Pavelić used under cover, see Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i ustaše*, 68.

to access the ministry's answers to Pavelić's four requests. His call for a loan was deemed "reasonable." The ministry expected that the sum required would not be "exceedingly modest," however, and thus suggested that "a way be figured out for the amount to show up on the market of Zagreb without attracting too much attention." As for the weapons necessary for action in grand style, the note reported that, at the opportune time, armament for the Croatian forces would be made available "at the border, which, for obvious reasons, and also for greater ease of passage, will be the Hungarian one." Establishing a Friends of Croatia association was viewed as "feasible." The request to open secret Italian-Croatian negotiations, on the other hand, was rejected: "in the current state of affairs, a negotiation table appears entirely premature."⁴

THE ENGINEER'S MISSION

On 4 July 1929, four days after the ministerial note was written, a fiduciary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who signed himself "the engineer" met with "the friend Tomoff" in Vienna to define in detail the "organization of the deliveries." The reader will remember that Gustav Perčec had accompanied Pavelić to Sofia, and then to Italy, using a Bulgarian passport in the name of Tomoff. As for the engineer, the latter was an "agent for the Croatian movement" whom people within the ministry referred to "by his initial, A." Through a personal representative in Vienna, the engineer was supplying Perčec with a certain number of "oranges" (i.e. hand grenades), which the movement urgently needed. "I have already arranged for the shipment of the remaining 250 oranges in stock in Trieste, which haven't been cleared through customs. [...] As agreed on, 250 more have already been ordered." On 7 July, Perčec and the engineer went to Budapest to make agreements with emissaries from Croatia. In his report to the ministry, the engi-

4 DDI, 7th series, vol. 9, doc. 33, 53–54. The note dated 30 June 1929, drafted by Mario Indelli, head of the Balkans Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, had ended up in a 1935 file.

neer “A” wrote: “In Budapest, where I enjoy several relations of friendship dating back to the time I spent there with Colonel Romanelli, I have had the chance to confer at length with an official assigned to the intelligence service within the Ministry of Defense.”⁵

A Colonel Romanelli had in fact directed the Italian military mission in Budapest in 1919, and a Lieutenant Angelini, a young officer of the ITO office, had taken part in that mission, traveling back and forth between Trieste and Budapest.⁶ It’s the same Giannino Angelini we placed in Trieste in 1928 supplying Croats and Macedonians with weapons and ammunition on behalf of the Servizio Informazioni Militare (Military Intelligence Service, SIM).

In his meeting with the Hungarian secret service official, A(ngelini) tested the ground as to “the possibility of arranging for a certain number of machine guns and battle rifles to enter into Hungary, to be made available to Croats in the event of an insurrection foreshadowing their liberation from the Serbian yoke.” The Magyar officer answered that the Hungarian government did not want to “compromise itself officially yet.” Nevertheless, he believed—as did others in the general staff—that the time was right “to start outlining” the possibility of collaboration between Italy and Hungary “in the practical field.”⁷

THE BIRTH OF THE CROATIA OFFICE

In the course of 1929, the authorities in Belgrade directed their repressive measures against the two leaders of the Croatian coalition who had remained in the country. In mid-May, the head of the Democratic Party, Svetozar Pribićević, wrote Pavelić a letter claiming that he supported the latter’s movement (that is, the separatist committee established abroad) “completely and unconditionally.”⁸ A few days later,

5 DDI, 7th series, vol. 7, doc. 539, 522.

6 Romanelli, *Nell’Ungheria di Bela Kun e durante l’occupazione militare romana*, 240.

7 DDI, 7th series, vol. 7, doc. 539, 522.

8 DDI, 7th series, vol. 7, doc. 458, 452.

Pribićević was arrested and rendered harmless by way of strict confinement. His secretary fled Yugoslavia, as did many other opponents of the regime who were being targeted by the police, and the separatists answered by using their oranges: on 6 August 1929, several of them were fired in a military aviation camp, and in two police barracks in Zagreb and Varaždin. Suspicions focused on the Peasant Party, and Gustav Košutić, who served as its vice president, left the country, joining the ranks of political émigrés. President Maček and Radić's widow had authorized him to "collaborate with Pavelić and with Perčec."⁹ Meanwhile, King Alexander had promoted a government inquiry into the Croatian Peasant Bank's alleged funding of separatist terrorism. Simply put, the bank had financed the Peasant Party, and Maček was asking Italy for help to pay back a loan of 350,000 dinars, thereby avoiding "legal consequences against bank managers simultaneously at the head of the Croatian opposition."¹⁰ Grandi immediately made the required sum available, and the bank was able to balance its budget.

On 17 December, a special train carrying a large group of pro-government Croatian politicians, financiers, and industrialists left Zagreb for Belgrade, where the men were to "swear allegiance to the good king Alexander of Yugoslavia."¹¹ No sooner had the convoy left the station in Zagreb, however, than it was blown up by a bomb placed on the tracks. A Croatian colonel, suspected of being the middleman between Maček and the terrorists, was arrested and tortured. Finally, the officer told the police what it wanted to know. Maček was placed under arrest and referred to the special court, which kept him imprisoned for six months, despite not being able to find proof of any subversive activity on his part.

While opposition was decapitated within the country, the committee established abroad was gaining strength. In July, at a Croatian-Macedonian conference in Bologna, Pavelić and Perčec discussed a

9 DDI, 7th series, vol. 7, doc. 593, 589.

10 DDI, 7th series, vol. 8, doc. 46, 67.

11 Broche, *Assassinat de Alexandre Ier et Louis Barthou*, 31.

common plan of action with Mihailov.¹² In August, the exile Košutić traveled to Livorno to meet with Pavelić, covertly returning to Zagreb after that and then going back to Italy in October, with Maček's approval. It seemed as if the insurrection might break out in the course of the winter, and Košutić requested a high-level meeting. Košutić was married to Radić's daughter, Mira; he had been Radić's "confidant and travel companion," and was considered "the Peasant Party's foreign policy expert."¹³ While Pavelić enjoyed the support of a small party, Košutić stood for Croatia's great peasant masses.

Grandi, who had just taken office at the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, arranged for the two Croats to meet with the journalist Forges Davanzati and with Paolo Cortese, an expert in Balkan matters whom the newly appointed minister co-opted to work in his cabinet as a "political and diplomatic observer."¹⁴ Forges and Cortese met with Pavelić and Košutić on 15 October 1929, and that same evening Grandi read their report. Their plan of action closely followed the one Pavelić had already put forward in June. What was novel, however, was that the front had broadened, so that Pavelić and Košutić could profess to be "no longer émigrés, but envoys of the Croatian people through legitimate representation of all parties."¹⁵ Reporting back to Grandi, the Italian emissaries admitted to having reservations about the "Croatian movement's asserted certainty of outcome," but they also expressed their belief that it must be endorsed. Before forwarding the report to Mussolini, Grandi noted down these words: "These people possess the enthusiasm, but not yet the instinct of revolution. In any case, there is no doubt that there have been progress and maturation."¹⁶ According to Grandi, Macedonians were providing a decisive contri-

¹² While in Bologna, Pavelić also met with Gabor Apor, the director of the political office of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i ustaše*, 60 and 66).

¹³ Sadkovich, "Opportunismo esitante," 418–19.

¹⁴ Archivio di Stato di Perugia (State Archive of Perugia; henceforth ASP), Acts of the so-called "Roatta trial," Perugia's Court of Appeals, criminal trials 1026/1-2-3-4, folder 2, file "Cortese," 3.

¹⁵ Sadkovich, "Opportunismo esitante," 419.

¹⁶ DDI, 7th series, vol. 8, doc. 129, 146.

bution: "Croats agree with Macedonians, and while Croats have neither the instinct nor the sensitivity for revolution, Macedonians possess too much of both. And Macedonians have no other choice but this: the king must be killed."¹⁷

Meanwhile, Grandi was doing everything he could with the available funds to support the activities of separatists. He had already spent "a total of roughly 400,000 [lire]" to "supply Croats with weapons (guns and ammunitions)." As for heavy armaments, which were to pass through the Hungarian border, there were still some obstacles that needed to be overcome, and Grandi sent Cortese to Budapest to speak "with our military attaché, and possibly even with Walko," who at the time was the foreign affairs minister for the Hungarian government.¹⁸

Paolo Cortese, who was becoming Grandi's proxy on the question of Croatia, had received a similar training to that of the secret agents Finzi and Angelini. During World War I, Lieutenant Cortese served as the "officer in charge of the Third Army's intelligence service"; much-decorated and promoted to captain, at the end of the war he was sent to the "intelligence center in Paris," and later, between 1919 and 1920, to the one attached to the "Italian military mission in Budapest."¹⁹ After a long mission in Albania, he returned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where he worked in the Albania Office, before being co-opted into the ministry's cabinet as an observer.

Having decided to support Košutić and Pavelić in every way possible, toward the end of 1929, Grandi concentrated all pro-separatist activity in the Croatia Office, the direction of which was entrusted to Paolo Cortese, who held that position for five years. The office also managed the funds intended for the movement, and started working in close connection with the military intelligence service and the police forces involved in the matter. Cortese enjoyed direct contact with the highest exponents of opposition abroad: in Geneva he met with

¹⁷ Cited by Gobetti, *Dittatore per caso*, 35.

¹⁸ DDI, 7th series, vol. 8, doc. 129, 146.

¹⁹ ASP, Acts of the so-called "Roatta trial," folder 1, file 17.

Krnjević, the secretary-general of the Peasant Party, in Salzburg he had dealings with Maček, and in Prague he met with Pribičević.

THE CROATIAN–MACEDONIAN FRONT

Protogerov's assassination at the hands of Mihailov had split the Macedonian committee in two. Grandi had promised Tomalewski a million lire in support of the current loyal to Protogerov, but after paying an advance on this sum had closed his purse, biding his time until the situation was clarified. Late in October 1929, two IMRO agents, Karajov and Evtimov, met with one of Grandi's trusted men, who told them that Italy deplored the dissent that was festering among Macedonian patriots, as well as the schism that had weakened and set back the movement. The two answered that Mihailov's wing of the IMRO was the only representative of the Macedonian movement, for it was backed by "the vast majority of local groups and organizations," whereas "Tomalewski's splinter group" counted but a handful of partisans. After all, the IMRO had banned Tomalewski a year before, and because he persisted in his mistaken ways his fate was "set."²⁰ Grandi wrote the Duce: "Contacts with Mihailov's camp are well established by now, and they will be diligently maintained." He added that he did not intend to "abandon [Tomalewski's current] entirely," but rather "to keep in touch with both organizations by way of different fiduciaries."²¹

A few weeks later, Grandi received a visit by the minister of the royal house, Bogoljub Jevtić, the right-hand man to the king and the person effectively in charge of Yugoslav foreign policy. The meeting at Palazzo Chigi lasted two hours and was particularly warlike. Grandi accused Yugoslavia of having become "the instrument of provocation" of the French general staff in the Adriatic: "For three years now you have been pursuing a policy of provocation in the field of politics, and

²⁰ DDI, 7th series, vol. 9, doc. 46, 67–69.

²¹ DDI, 7th series, vol. 8, doc. 222, 233. Tomalewski was assassinated in Sofia on 2 December 1930 by one of Mihailov's hired guns.

of feverish military preparation, which is disproportionate to your ordinary needs." Jevtić did not deny his country's close bond with France, or Belgrade's armament policy: "This is happening, however, because we fear you. You, too, are arming yourselves; your politics is the expression of a great power seeking new paths, new outlets, and new territories. Italy is preparing for war, and naturally for war against us—the closest and smallest. [...] [W]e have no choice but to defend ourselves." Jevtić later addressed the issue of Italian support to Croats and Macedonians: "The Serbian government cannot help but be shocked, particularly by a certain activity that is taking place in Italy and in the Yugoslav territory itself against the unity of our state." Grandi replied that Italy looked kindly on the irredentist movement, and that its sympathy was owed to all peoples who were fighting for freedom. In this specific case, though, its favorable attitude was further fueled by the fact that the Croatian and Macedonian movements constituted "an element of retaliation" against Serbia's provocations. "You can rest assured," Grandi concluded, "that our sympathy, which so concerns you, would dwindle to the smallest amount allowed by the Italian spirit, idealistic and chivalrous by nature, if only Serbia would show in deed, rather than by words, to have changed its course toward Italy." Jevtić and Grandi parted company after mutually agreeing to work to improve relations between their two countries. The Italian minister, however, added the following footnote to the meeting's record for Mussolini: "War against Yugoslavia is inevitable. [...] Inasmuch as there will be a war, we must wage it, as we will do, at the time chosen by us."²²

THE VATICAN AND THE CROATIAN QUESTION

At the beginning of 1930, one year into the dictatorship, the Catholic hierarchy and masses of devout Croats were very worried. Belgrade was passing laws restricting Catholic associations, as well as a bill on

²² DDI, 7th series, vol. 8, doc. 302, 331–32 and 334.

primary school education that made it possible for lay people to teach religion, previously a prerogative of priests. The old primate of Croatia and archbishop of Zagreb, Antun Bauer, protested vigorously on behalf of the Croatian Church, referencing, among other things, the encyclical Pius XI issued in December 1929, which claimed the Church's primacy in the Christian upbringing of the youth.²³ The Serbian religion minister summoned Monsignor Bauer to Belgrade, and asked him to make a lengthy public declaration of loyalty to the Karađorđević dynasty and to the regime of Belgrade, in which he was to stress that he was "absolutely under the influence of no foreign power." Antun Bauer refused categorically, and reaffirmed his loyalty and full submission to the pope. Back in Zagreb, the archbishop secretly informed "one of the heads of the Croatian opposition" that the clergy was "united" in endorsing him, with the sole exception of the bishop of Djakovo, Monsignor Akšamović, who had yet to speak either for or against him.

Consul General Rochira was quick to grasp the implications of the clergy's decision to take sides, and wrote to Rome: "The Holy See's stance on this question will have very important political consequences for the Croatian opposition."²⁴ The foreign affairs undersecretary, Fani, invited the Italian ambassador to the Vatican, Cesare Maria De Vecchi, to probe into the Secretariat of State's leanings with the utmost prudence and discretion. A week later, De Vecchi answered that the Holy See had given Bauer its "full support," both on the matter of Catholic associations and, "more importantly, on the matter of the law on primary school education." However, in view of its "extremely delicate nature," the Vatican intended to observe strict silence on the issue, also bearing in mind that the Yugoslav government was "coming to terms" and seemed determined to "reach an agreement with the Holy See."²⁵

The Secretariat of State's discretion did not prevent the authoritative Jesuit journal *La Civiltà Cattolica* from addressing the matter of

²³ *La Civiltà Cattolica* I (1930): 193, Pio XI, "Divini Illius Magistri".

²⁴ DDI, 7th series, vol. 8, doc. 380, 442n.

²⁵ DDI, 7th series, vol. 8, doc. 396, 463.

religion in Croatia at some length. On 15 February 1930, the new laws passed by the government of Belgrade were decried as “aimed at religious persecution.” The periodical attacked “the masonry, master of the government,” which, having “destroyed the parliament and taken all freedom away from the press,” now invaded “the field of proper freedom of conscience and education with greater tyranny than ever.” By these new laws, the government intended to stop the youth from joining Marian congregations and all other religious organizations. After dissolving the Orlovi (Eagles), a Catholic youth organization, the government now aimed to unify all athletic youth groups under a new “militarized” body, the Sokol of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, in which “any non-Yugoslav national action” would be banned, and “all religious influence forbidden.”²⁶

The Jesuits’ attack and Bauer’s resolve induced Belgrade to mitigate some of its measures. The principle whereby “religious education is provided by priests” was reintroduced into the law on primary schools, and pupils were once again allowed “to join religious organizations outside of school.” The dissolved Eagles association, comprising 30,000 *orli* and *orlice*, was swiftly reestablished and given the eloquent name of Križari (Crusaders). In July, the second conference of the Slavic Catholic University Youth, a group affiliated with Pax Romana, was held in Ljubljana. One hundred and eighty Croatian, Polish, Russian, Slovakian, Slovenian, and Ukrainian delegates participated. That August, the Eucharistic Congress held in Zagreb, with over 200,000 people in attendance, crowned the resurgence of Catholic religious activity in Croatia. The mayor delivered the Croatian capital’s greetings in tones “vibrating with piety and patriotism.” And, after the pontifical solemn mass, “those hundreds of thousands of devout Catholics sang the Sacred Heart hymn and the Croatian national anthem, as if in a single voice.”²⁷

26 *La Civiltà Cattolica* I (1930): 326 and 335, *Le nuove leggi scolastiche e il monopolio educativo in Jugoslavia*, 326–338.

27 *Ibid.* I (1930): 82–85, *Corrispondenza dalla Jugoslavia*, 82–87.

FROM THE DOMOBRAN TO THE USTAŠA

In July 1929, Pavelić was sentenced to death, in absentia, by Belgrade's special court. He was already in Italy at the time, yet had to move with extreme circumspection to avoid being exposed to the reprisals threatened against him many times over. He often changed his residence and identity under the protection of the Italian police, and enjoyed special treatment: he received "consistently adequate" subsidies, both for his personal needs and for the needs of his organization, and the Fascist government provided for his family to live "in luxurious conditions."²⁸ His program was broadly endorsed by the entire coalition, but Pavelić knew how varied that front was. If the Croatian Serb Pribićević, the federalist Trumbić, and even Maček shared his plan for the creation of an independent Croatian state bound to Italy, it was only due to the iron fist of Belgrade's dictatorship. While Pavelić was the undisputed leader of the radical wing, the lack of a mass following put him in a state of inferiority within the coalition, particularly when confronted with Maček. After leaving Zagreb with the mandate to organize the Croatian opposition abroad, Pavelić had strengthened his position by achieving important results. Even the death sentence pronounced against him by the court of Zagreb had served to increase his prestige. With Perčec's help, even before leaving Croatia he had set up a prototype of a paramilitary body, the Blue Shirts youth group, and founded the periodical *The Croatian Soldier* (*Hrvatski Domobran*), which invited Croats to fight with every means, legal or not, to attain independence. In the course of 1929, with the collaboration of Mihailov's men and with Italy's support, the terrorist activity was reinforced, and the periodical became a symbol of the struggle for independence.²⁹ Pavelić started seeking the mass support he lacked at home elsewhere.

²⁸ DDI, 9th series, vol. 6, doc. 935, 876 and 880.

²⁹ In 1929, Pavelić wrote the pamphlet "Uspostava hrvatske države-trajni mir na Balkanu" (The creation of the Croatian state for durable peace in the Balkans). The underlying issue of the text was the country's role as *Antemurale Christianitatis*—that is, Croatia's being a bulwark against Serbian imperialism. In 1931, another text by Pavelić addressing the same matter came out in Vienna with the periodical *Grič*: "Aus dem kampf um den selbständigen Staat Kroatien." An article in French, "La restauration économique des pays danubiens; le désarmement, Belgrade et la Croatie," further came out with the periodical *Grič* in 1932.

In Europe, there were hundreds of thousands of Croatian emigrants, who worked in factories or as miners, particularly in Germany, in France, and in the mines of Belgium. An additional 500,000 people had emigrated overseas, mostly to the United States, Brazil, and Argentina, but also to Chile, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. Predominantly Dalmatian and Croatian–Bosnian in origin, these emigrants were typically Catholic, and the care of their souls was in the hands of Franciscan missionaries, who traveled back and forth between convents in their homeland and the communities established abroad. Each community had its own church and its own patriotic association, both of which were often supervised and energized by one and the same friar. The Domobran movement—which supported Pavelić's action by way of propaganda and fund raising—started developing in this context, both in Europe and in the Americas.³⁰

In May 1930, when Pavelić had been in Italy for a year, the first issue of a new magazine came out, *The Insurgent (Ustaša)*, which announced the birth of the Croatian Revolutionary Organization (Ustaša Hrvatska Revolucionarna Organizacija, UHRO). The heading of the paper, which was not published at fixed intervals, prominently displayed a blue U enclosing a silver hand grenade overlaid with the Croatian coat of arms. A red flame—borrowed from the emblem of the Italian Royal Carabinieri—blazed out of the grenade, in a meaningful homage to the country that financed the paper and the newly established movement.

The structure of the secret Ustaša organization, which in large part resembled the one of Mihailov's IMRO, was revealed in greater detail over the course of three years. Its statute appeared on the magazine in 1932, and its norms in 1933.³¹ Secret cells active at the lowest level re-

30 *Hrvatski Domobran* started coming out as a weekly magazine in Buenos Aires in 1930, as did the monthly *Croazia, boletín mensual*. Meanwhile, *Hrvatsko Pravo* was being published in San Francisco, whereas *Nezavisna Država Hrvatska* was being circulated in New York, Pittsburgh, and Chicago, as well as in Europe. Furthermore, *Grič* was being printed in Vienna, and *Nova Ves* and, for a time, *Die Kroatische Frage* were being published in Berlin (Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret*, 175–200).

31 See Jareb, *Ustasha Movement, 1929–1941*.

ported to territorial committees, which in turn depended on a central command or general staff (*glavni ustaški stan*), presided over by the *po-glavnik* (leader or commander), Ante Pavelić. The organization's objectives were clearly stated in its statute: "The Ustaša Croatian revolutionary organization aims to free Croatia from the foreign yoke, by way of armed revolt (revolution), so that it may become a free and independent state throughout its national and historical territory."³² "National territory" referred to modern-day Croatia, a part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, whereas "historical territory" referred to the thousand-year-old kingdom of Croatia, comprising Croatia, Slavonia, Syrmia, Dalmatia, Bosnia, and Herzegovina. The Ustasha organization "will fight in order that the Croatian state may always be ruled by the Croatian people alone, the rightful holders of all the material and spiritual goods of their land." How the will of the people had manifested itself was not divulged in the statute or in the norms that appeared later. These only set forth general principles, such as the nonexistence of a Yugoslav people, the natural and historical right of the Croatian people to their own state, the fundamental role of the Croatian peasant, viewed as the core of the nation. There was also a norm pertaining to race: only those "belonging to the Croatian people by descent and blood" would be entitled to exercise popular sovereignty.³³ Anti-Serbian sentiments were well summarized by Pavelić's maxim: "A head for a tooth, ten heads for one." The sacredness of the struggle was set in stone in the Ustasha motto "Bog i Hrvati" (God and the Croats).

PROPAGANDA AND ARMED ACTION

Given the high concentration of Croatian emigrants in the mining regions of Belgium, in the autumn of 1930, Pavelić sent Gustav Perčec there with the task of founding an association among the workers,

³² Pavelić, "Dalla prigionia di Torino," 85.

³³ Jareb, *Ustasha Movement, 1929–1941*, 8.

which took the name of the Croatian League and soon became one of the main recruiting centers for the Ustasha militia. In February 1931, another one of Pavelić's closest collaborators—Branimir Jelić, a medical doctor—set off for South America. Pavelić, too, traveled from one place to another, carefully followed and protected by the Italian authorities. At the end of 1930, he went to Fiume to organize propaganda abroad, and oversee the arrival of fugitives from Yugoslavia; during his stay in the city, Italian agents watched over his safety. On 5 February 1931, accompanied by an Italian general and his security detail, he went to Opatija (Abbazia) for an organizational conference with the representatives of propaganda and immigration centers of Rijeka (Fiume), Zadar (Zara), and Trieste.³⁴ A few days later, the Yugoslav police uncovered an organization directed by a wealthy Zagreb merchant by the name of Relja, an Italian citizen, who "through agents hired for the purpose and particularly through peasants" smuggled "huge numbers of anti-Serbian and antiregime leaflets, printed declarations and books" into Yugoslavia.³⁵ And what was happening in Zara, was also happening in Fiume and in Trieste.

The Serbian police did not limit itself to fighting infiltrations. Jails were full of political prisoners, and in addition to death sentences there were "suicides" caused by excess of torture. Milan Šufflay's demise caused a wave of indignation in Croatia: on the evening of 18 February 1931, the renowned historian, who had sided with the separatists, was killed by two police agents in Zagreb. During an organizational trip to Germany, Pavelić escaped an attempted assassination by three Belgrade policemen.³⁶ Three other Serbian hit men prepared a trap for Gustav Perčec in Vienna, but were arrested by the Austrian police before they could fulfill their plans. Pavelić and Perčec answered in their own way. At dawn on 17 March 1931, three bombs went off in Belgrade near the

34 Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i ustaše*, 72.

35 DDI, 7th series, vol. 10, doc. 45, 65. On crossing the border, some peasants handed the material over to the Yugoslav authorities so as to collect the reward and avoid losing their frontier passes.

36 Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i ustaše*, 80–81.

Ministry of War and the military academy. A fourth bomb went off in the hands of an inexperienced Serbian officer, who had tried to remove it. Other bombs exploded in Zagreb, and additional terrorist attacks against trains occurred in September, on the occasion of the elections imposed by the king and boycotted by all non-Serbian parties, as well as by the radical-democratic Serbian wing.

From Belgrade, Italian Ambassador Galli informed Grandi that “discontent” with the dictatorial government and with the king himself was “extraordinary throughout the country.” Galli further wrote that “never before has the climate been so favorable to conspiracy and plotting, nor has all manner of unexpected events ever been more possible.”³⁷ Well aware of who was fomenting instability in the country, King Alexander reintroduced—by way of Ambassador Galli—the issue of economic and political cooperation with Italy, in view of a “general Italian–Yugoslav agreement” that might ensure “the definitive and immutable stabilization of the entire Balkan region.”³⁸ Grandi and Mussolini only answered in vague and dilatory terms, however.

Thanks to Italian support, Pavelić’s action abroad and Maček’s undertakings at home were intensifying. Meanwhile, Pribićević had received the endorsement of Leon Blum, the head of the French Socialist Party, and all the leaders of the coalition now agreed that the Serbian dictatorship was running out of time. While Galli did not underestimate the strength of the opposition, he did not believe it would be able to topple the regime on its own. Further, he was convinced that the “ex-Austrian sentiment” was predominant—though perhaps latent—among Croats, and that as a result, if the country ever managed to gain independence from Belgrade, its majority would turn to Vienna.³⁹ According to Grandi, the Croatian movement could not be an “immediate factor for the radical transformation of the Yugoslav internal

³⁷ DDI, 7th series, vol. 11, doc. 32, 50.

³⁸ DDI, 7th series, vol. 11, doc. 66, 115. See also the attachments to 115–18.

³⁹ DDI, 7th series, vol. 11, doc. 121, 216.

order." Still, it warranted continued support, for "the Croatian question is now on the international agenda, and, in the current state of affairs, we would benefit from its being kept alive."⁴⁰

THE NUCLEUS

A first secret meeting between the Duce and the *poglavnik* likely occurred in June 1929, although Mussolini always denied it. He also refused to acknowledge the existence of a second meeting, but Grandi mentioned such an instance in a letter to Suvich in January 1933: "The Duce surely remembers that a year ago I brought Pavelić before him at Palazzo Venezia to discuss setting up a Croatian newspaper in Geneva."⁴¹ In the encounter cited by Grandi, or during another meeting shortly before or after that one, Pavelić and Mussolini addressed more important matters as well. Indeed, in the early months of 1932, Mussolini gave Pavelić "the authorization" to establish a "military nucleus" in Italy.⁴² The creation of an Ustasha military base on Italian soil exceeded the plan of action that Pavelić and Grandi had agreed on in 1929. Politically, it was no small decision, both because of the costs of the operation, borne by the Italian apparatus, and because of the risks of unpleasant international repercussions, should such a plan be exposed.

Nevertheless, in the course of 1932, Pavelić organized a political-military structure in Italy that turned on "three hinges,"⁴³ namely, a center of command, a military nucleus, and an immigration network. Pavelić's headquarters was established in Brescia, where a press was set up to print newspapers and propaganda material. The military nucleus—some fifteen people at first, later joined by new arrivals—was lodged in a farm near Bovegno. A former Austro-Hungarian officer of Hungarian nationality oversaw the soldiers' military training and

⁴⁰ DDI, 7th series, vol. 11, doc. 66, 114.

⁴¹ DDI, 7th series, vol. 13, doc. 71, 76.

⁴² DDI, 9th series, vol. 6, doc. 935, 876.

⁴³ Iuso, *Il fascismo e gli Ustascia (1929-1941)*, 41.

discipline, whereas the imparting of guerrilla techniques was within the jurisdiction of the Croats Mijo Babić and Zvonko Pospišil, and of the Macedonian Vlado Georgijev, a specialist in *ad personam* attacks hailing from the ranks of Mihailov. The immigration network was centered in Milan, in Via Bambaia 2, and directed by Pavle Djurić (alias Stanko Hranilović). Through the network, political exiles coming from many different countries—as well as young factory workers and miners recruited in France, in Belgium, and in Germany—made their way into Italy. Aspiring Ustashas were recruited after careful examination aimed at preventing attempted infiltrations. Documents, photographs, and personal details were sent to a post office box in Chiasso, near the Italian border in Switzerland, and forwarded to Milan from there. The center in Via Bambaia, which also performed intelligence tasks, checked the data it received against the information it was able to attain from its own sources, and proceeded to call in the men it selected. Before reaching Italy, the latter were to go through other countries, hide their tracks by changing identities several times, go to Switzerland, and enter into Italy from Chiasso—going to Milan first, and then to Bovegno.⁴⁴

Other important centers were the ones in Trieste, Fiume, and Zara, three border cities through which men, weapons, and propaganda material entered into Yugoslavia, and fugitives fled it. The Croat Ante Godina, who collaborated with the gun manufacturer and seller Angelini, and was responsible for deposits to and withdrawals from the “known account at the Yugoslav Bank,” was in charge of the center in Trieste; Godina enjoyed special treatment, for the *poglavnik* not only supported his family, but even paid his son’s tuition at the Aricianum, the Jesuit Institute in Brescia.⁴⁵ The organization’s leading man in Fiume was another Croat, Vjekoslav Servatzy, a former officer of the Austro-Hungarian army closely connected with Pavelić and the Italian military se-

⁴⁴ See Sadkovich’s acute analysis, “La composizione degli ustascia.”

⁴⁵ ACS, DGPS/AEC, b. 7/40-1-4, f. 9, 14.6.1936.

cret service, which had "harbored him in Italy since 1919."⁴⁶ Ante Brkan was in charge of the center in Zara.

Sarkotić, Perčević, and Colonel Duić carried out their activity in Vienna, where the paper *The Hill* (*Grič*) was also being printed. Ivica Frank was the leading man in Budapest. Gustav Perčec traveled back and forth between the Austrian and the Hungarian capitals, until finally, toward the end of 1931, Pavelić's military arm rented a farm in Jankapuszta, in the Hungarian countryside, close to the Yugoslav border, and turned it into a training camp and a base from which to launch terrorist attacks in Croatia.

The novelist Mile Budak was a prominent figure in Zagreb. After spending eight months in jail under suspicion of organizing terrorist operations, he was released for lack of evidence, and on 7 June 1932 the police struck out to kill him; he survived, but was seriously injured in the attack. Two hundred intellectuals signed a petition in his behalf, and, while he was still recovering, he fled the country, reaching Pavelić in Italy. Vlado Singer was another one of Pavelić's close collaborators in Zagreb. In 1932, he organized a number of demonstrations against King Alexander, and the following year he founded the paper *Naša Gruda, Omladinski List za Suvremena Pitanja* (Our land, a youth paper on contemporary matters).⁴⁷ Only two issues came out before Singer was forced to flee to Vienna. Nonetheless, the paper was able to introduce new, clearly profascist and pro-Nazi ideological concepts into Croatia. Back home, young intellectuals such as Eugen-Dido Kvaternik, born to a storied family of nationalists, and the lawyer Andrija Artuković were establishing themselves among the organization's leading men. Many students and graduates who embraced the Ustasha cause had been educated at Franciscan high schools and at the divinity school of the university of Zagreb.⁴⁸

46 Iuso, *Il fascismo e gli Ustascia (1929-1941)*, 51.

47 Goldstein, *Hrvatska 1918-2008*.

48 Artuković studied at the Franciscan boarding school of Široki Brijeg, together with Radoslav Glavaš, who later became one of the most important Franciscans of the Ustasha dictatorship.

Sarajevo, under the reign of archbishop Ivan Šarić and his zealous secretary Krunoslav Draganović, was another stronghold of Ustashism. The movement could also count on the support of the Crusaders youth group, which welcomed the first Ustashas into its headquarters between 1929 and 1934.⁴⁹ Pavelić could further count on a network of religious men, who favored his activity in cities, as well as in the countryside. The reverend Berković, active for many years in Drniš in Dalmatia, would later write: “My parsonage was a regular Ustasha quarters. Here was the meeting place not only of the local Ustashe but also of those who came from outside in order to organize the Ustasha movement here. [...] I was the chair of the Ustasha organization in Drniš.”⁵⁰ Mile Budak, one of the movement’s leaders, later added: “Ustashas dressed as monks reached the villages, concealing all manner of materials beneath their habits, and prepared people for insurrection.”⁵¹

An intricate chain of command—starting from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and involving several departments within the state apparatus—interacted with the complex Ustasha structure, referred to simply as the “Nucleus” in Italian documents. Personal contacts with Pavelić concerning both political matters and funding were entrusted to the head of the Croatia Office, Paolo Cortese, who, after Grandi stepped down from the ministry, responded directly to the undersecretary, Suvich, and to Mussolini, in his capacity as new foreign affairs minister. The head of the police, Arturo Bocchini, availed himself of the Office of Reserved Affairs, of prefectures, of central police stations, and of the border police to provide vigilance, protection, and logistic support. The SIM under Badoglio superintended the supply of weapons, and, in cooperation with embassies and consulates, assisted Pavelić’s outside network. Yet, in concomitance with the establishment of the Nucleus, the SIM started handling the matter directly in

49 Paris, *Genocidio nella Croazia satellite*, 77.

50 Dedijer, *The Yugoslav Auschwitz and the Vatican*, 52. Hundreds of cases akin to the one involving the reverend Berković are documented in Viktor Novak’s monumental research, *Crimen Magnum*.

51 In Paris, *Genocidio nella Croazia satellite*, 56.

Italy, too. Until then, the SIM's tasks had for the most part involved espionage abroad. However, after 1932, when Colonel Vittorio Sogno was placed at the helm of the SIM, proper counterespionage conducted in metropolitan areas started taking shape as well. The latter was entrusted to the counterespionage Third Section, the management of which fell to Lieutenant Colonel Giuseppe Piéche of the Carabinieri. The newly established counterespionage unit's task was to oppose the action of foreign secret agents in Italy.⁵² Pavelić's Nucleus was becoming a particularly sensitive target, which therefore had to be protected by any means necessary. Serbian spies in Italy referred to the Yugoslav embassy in Rome, and Lieutenant Colonel Piéche set up a surveillance system so meticulous that encrypted messages were rarely sent to Belgrade before the counterespionage unit was aware of their content. In addition to protecting the Nucleus, the SIM helped it to acquire its own intelligence structure.⁵³

THE "UPRISING" IN LIKA AND THE FASCIST INTERNATIONAL

As the Nucleus was being born, Pavelić intensified his insurrectional propaganda: "Knife, pistol, automatic shotgun, and time bomb," the *poglavnik* wrote, "these are the bells that will announce the dawn and birth of the independent Croatian state."⁵⁴ The first attempt at revolt on Yugoslav territory occurred between the summer and fall of 1932. In August, a dozen Ustasas trained at the camp in Bovegno reached Zara, where they boarded a fishing boat that took them to a desert-

52 Colonel Sogno was in charge of the SIM from January 1932 to January 1934. Piéche directed the counterespionage section from July 1932 to July 1935; in the Great War, he had led the security service of the Supreme Command, and between 1920 and 1921, during Colonel Finzi's anti-Yugoslav action, he had been at the helm of the Internal Company of the Carabinieri in Trieste.

53 The Ustasha secret service (Ustaška Obavještajna Služba, UOS) was activated from Pavelić's headquarters in 1934 (Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i ustaše*, 147).

54 From Pavelić's article "Ropstvo je dodijalo," which appeared in *Ustaša* in February 1932. Other articles inciting insurrection were featured, that same spring, in the paper *Grič* (Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i ustaše*, 85–88).

ed stretch of the Yugoslav coastline, south of Fiume. They had Italian arms and wore “black uniforms, similar to those worn by fascists,” complete with boots and leather gaiters, gun belts, and daggers; their military caps featured the letter U; their capes were “the ones in use by the Carabinieri.”⁵⁵ The commando unit worked its way into the mountainous region of Lika, and incorporated a handful of local rebels—among whom the Devčić brothers stood out—into its ranks. On the night between 6 and 7 September, the Ustasha set off a number of explosive devices planted in the police station of Brušani, and made an attack on a nearby house “where two policemen lived.”⁵⁶ After this terrorist act, the commando sought refuge in the woods, while several regiments of the Yugoslav army placed the region in a state of siege.⁵⁷ As they attempted to reach the coast, the Ustasha were intercepted by the police and lost two men; still, they managed to make it back to Zara on 19 October 1932. Marko Došen, Juco Rukavina, and the young lawyer Andrija Artuković, who at the time was living in Gospić, were among the organizers of the expedition.

After reading the internal affairs minister’s report, which clearly indicated that “the propaganda, weapons, and bombs had come from Italy,” King Alexander confided his “disgust” to an Italian interior designer in his service who knew Mussolini: “This is what Italians do, they try to stab us in our backs. [...] [T]ell Mr. Mussolini on my behalf that in order to produce any kind of real upheaval in Yugoslavia, to bring about changes in the regime, it’s me they must shoot down, and they had better make sure they kill me.”⁵⁸

55 Scotti, *Ustascia tra il fascio e la svastica*, 27.

56 Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i ustaše*, 96. Several other terrorist acts, which Perčec prepared in the base of Jankapuszta, accompanied the Lika operation: a bomb at the station of Osijek, other bombs on a train, and along the Zagreb–Belgrade railroad, others still in Zagreb, in proximity to an Orthodox church, and in the courtyard of an infantry barracks. The former minister Mirko Neudorfer was among the victims (Goldstein, *Hrvatska 1918–2008*, 145).

57 In the roundups that followed to identify the assaulters and their accomplices, some 150 peasants were arrested; in the ensuing trials, the Yugoslav courts sentenced one man to death and many others to serve several years in jail (Goldstein, *Hrvatska 1918–2008*, 144).

58 DDI, 7th series, vol. 12, doc. 357, 454. A renowned designer, Guido Malagola Cappi was furnishing the Serbian mansion after he had renovated the Rocca delle Caminate for Mussolini.

The Ustasha expedition in Lika could be seen as having failed, for it had not caused any popular insurrection. Was that the operation's intended aim, though? Could Pavelić, Mussolini, and their advisers possibly believe they might bring about a mass revolt by deploying twenty Ustasas? Conversely, if the purpose was to give the enemy a lesson as a demonstration, which could be exploited to the utmost in terms of propaganda (a strategy well suited to Mussolini's style), then, admittedly, the Lika operation proved successful. Thanks to the relentless press campaign orchestrated by the Duce, the Croatian fighters' enterprise drew all of Europe's attention. Indeed, it was the pet subject in the impressive events organized to celebrate the ten-year anniversary of the fascist revolution, which started soon after the Lika operation and coincided with the official launching of universal fascism and of the Fascist International. The action carried out by the Ustasha was touted as a symbol of the fascist march toward a "new Europe." "The fascist revolution," Asvero Gravelli wrote, "flows over Europe, and gives impulse to national revolutions." And the Duce announced: "In a decade Europe will be fascist or fascistized!"⁵⁹

On 10 November 1932, Mussolini received Gömbös, the Hungarian prime minister. At the end of the long meeting, also attended by Suvich, a plan for common action was drafted. The two countries would continue to support the Heimwehr, the Austrian paramilitary forces, to favor the birth of an authoritarian government led by Chancellor Dollfuss, firmly opposed to his country's union with Germany. The links between Italy, Austria, and Hungary were to be secured, and negotiations would be set in motion so as to reach a customs union agreement they could all benefit from. Another relevant point of the plan had to do with the Croatian question. Gömbös knew Pavelić, and considered him "reliable and honest"; Mussolini was convinced that he acted "out of patriotism" and with the best of intentions. The decision was thus made to favor "the insurrectional movement" by "joint

59 See Cuzzi, *L'internazionale delle camicie nere*, 55f.; and De Felice, *Mussolini il Duce*, I, 394f.

Italian–Hungarian action,” which would further entail support to the Macedonians.⁶⁰

After the operation in Lika, Pavelić was certain that the time was ripe for the decisive act that would spark popular insurrection. On 9 January 1933, the foreign affairs undersecretary, Fulvio Suvich, and the head of the cabinet, Pompeo Aloisi, met with the head of the Croatia Office, Paolo Cortese, and the director of the SIM, Vittorio Sogno. In his journal, Aloisi noted the following: “Sogno claims to have examined the plan delivered to Cortese by Pavelić together with the war minister and the chief of staff; all of them were under the impression that such a plan would inevitably lead to war.” According to Aloisi, the situation was “extremely serious and delicate” and it was “still necessary to wait,” both because Yugoslavia had yet to reach the critical point of disaggregation, and because Italy could not be compromised on the international stage at a time when the threat of the Anschluss—the unification of Austria and Germany under Hitler—loomed increasingly large on the horizon. Suvich and Aloisi told Mussolini that he should open diplomatic negotiations with Yugoslavia and aim to establish Croatia as a “buffer state.” An independent Croatia bound to Italy by a customs union, Aloisi maintained, “would bar Germany’s path along the Danube, and solve the problem of Central Europe, and the problem of the Adriatic.”⁶¹

Mussolini addressed the matter with Ambassador Galli, who was visiting Rome, on 26 April 1933. “We cannot allow the Anschluss on our borders,” the Duce said, “therefore [we must] defend and support Austria. We also have a second line of defense—that is, an agreement between Rome, Belgrade, and Budapest. [...] Reaching an understanding with Yugoslavia is essential in view of the threat that may come to us from the Anschluss.” Galli could reassure Belgrade that there would be no territorial claims on the part of Italy. But still, no agreement would be possible without “the elimination of the Croatian question.

60 DDI, 7th series, vol. 12, doc. 414, 534–36.

61 Aloisi, *Journal*, 48–49.

This issue must either reach its full development—for having a number of small states, rather than a single solid state, is in our best interest—or be eliminated by a modification of the Yugoslav internal situation.”⁶²

In the meantime, the Duce continued his efforts to spread fascism throughout Europe. On 15 July 1933, the Four-Power Pact—with which Mussolini intended to “bridle Berlin into an alliance that would recognize Rome, and Rome only, as its spiritual guide”—was signed in the Italian capital. That same day, in the solemn setting of the Capitoline Hill, the Action Committees for the Universality of Rome (CAUR) providing the foundation for the Fascist International were born. The CAUR were supposed to organize a fascist international network abroad “made up of Italian itinerant inspectors and stationary agents, supplemented by foreign political exponents and local movements, and having Rome as its linchpin.”⁶³ The lawyer Eugenio Coselschi, long active on the Balkan front, first as D’Annunzio’s secretary and then as Mussolini’s fiduciary, presided over the CAUR, and even inaugurated them with his book *Croatia libera*.⁶⁴ The CAUR and the Fascist International aimed to channel all fascist or fascist-like movements—including the Spanish Phalanx, Swiss fascists under Arthur Fonjallaz, and branches of the Action Française—toward Rome, and away from Berlin. Competition between Nazism and Fascism was manifesting itself particularly in the Balkan–Danubian region. To disseminate the Nazi ideology, Goebbels’s Ministry of Propaganda relied heavily on the German minorities settled beyond Germany’s eastern borders, and in Yugoslavia itself. Coselschi’s answer to this was to make alliances with the Heimwehr in Austria, with Bulgarian and Slovak nationalists, with Codreanu’s Iron Guard in Romania, and with national socialists in Greece, never neglecting Pavelić and Mihailov, with whom he had long been having “friendly, frequent and private” relations.⁶⁵

62 De Felice, *Mussolini il Duce*, I, 448.

63 Cuzzi, *L’internazionale delle camicie nere*, 67 and 12.

64 Coselschi, *Croazia libera*.

65 Cuzzi, *L’internazionale delle camicie nere*, 79.

THE STRENGTHENING OF THE NUCLEUS

In March 1933, the Ustasha camp in Bovegno and headquarters in Brescia were evacuated in secret, leaving no traces behind. The militia was transferred to Borgotaro, in the province of Parma, and Pavelić's headquarters was moved to Modena. The operation was arranged by the Croatia Office and was carried out by the police inspector, Ercole Conti, whom Arturo Bocchini appointed to provide the Nucleus with continued assistance in terms of organization and logistics. Conti had a scrupulous, thirty-year career by then; he had been the chief of police in Parma in 1929 and had later held the office of inspector general in Pisa, starting in 1931. Thus, he knew the area well and was, perhaps, chosen to be the keeper of the Ustasha for this reason. The decision to transfer the Nucleus to the Tuscan-Emilian Apennines was made for several purposes. The number of the Ustashes residing in the farmhouse of Bovegno had climbed to forty or so, and was becoming noticeable—as was the coming and going of Croatian political exiles in Brescia, where one evening there had been a brawl and a shot had been fired “shattering a post office window.”⁶⁶ But there had been other reasons for the decision, in addition to safety.

Recruitment efforts were being intensified to strengthen the Nucleus in preparation for its military deployment, and sites better suited to the accommodation and training of the men were needed. The transfer to Borgotaro took place in mid-March, and two months later the contingent numbered 140 men. Conti confiscated a large and remote barracks complex for the recruits, whereas officers in charge of training he lodged in town, at the Appennini Hotel first, and later in a small villa owned by the *podestà*'s sister, where a small press was also set up.⁶⁷ The inspector general had spread the word that they were foreigners hired to perform certain tasks in the surrounding woodlands, but this cover

66 Gobetti, *Dittatore per caso*, 49.

67 On the Nucleus's stay in Borgotaro, see Delgrosso, *Ustascia*.

did not last long. On 30 June 1933, Conti informed Bocchini that “the known foreigners” were extremely well-behaved, but that their continuous drills involving the use of weapons, the “Havana gray” camp uniforms they wore complete with “gaiters and gun belts,” the officers’ evening outings “in hazel gala uniforms,” and finally the chatter resulting from their presence in public places and ball rooms had persuaded the residents of Borgotaro that the men were not really “Bulgarian workers, as they had been made to believe, but a military division belonging to an unidentified nation, allied with Italy.”⁶⁸ On the night of 30 June, the Nucleus left Borgotaro and marching along mountain trails reached Vischetto, a hamlet belonging to the town of Bardi, in the province of Parma. Communicating with the head of the police, Conti described the location thus: “[It] is perfectly suited to the need for privacy, an indispensable requirement. It is situated in the midst of mountains, at an altitude of roughly 700 meters [...] and accessed by a very secondary and lightly trafficked route.”⁶⁹ Conti had rented an old chair factory on the outskirts of Vischetto—which in itself counted only 200 residents—and quickly renovated it, adapting it as a barracks. During the seven-month stay in Vischetto, the Ustasha contingent rose in number to 400, and, according to Inspector Conti, there existed “the intention to increase it to 1,000 men.”⁷⁰

The new recruits came from Belgium, France, and Germany. They were young men unemployed because of the Great Depression, which had spilled over from the United States to Europe. The perspective of a decent salary was no less appealing than the aspiration to free their country. Before entering Italy, most of these men went through Cologne, where a “sorting center” was in place, directed by Mladen Lorković. Budak and Jelić were also in Germany. Pavelić sent them there early in 1933 to intensify political activity in Croatian immigration centers. Alfred Rosenberg, who oversaw the National Socialist Party’s foreign

68 ACS, DGPS/ACE, b. 7, f. 40-1-1, 19 June 1933.

69 Ibid., 26 June 1933.

70 DDI, 9th series, vol. 6, doc. 935, 876.

affairs office, received the two very well, and they were able to launch the publication of the agency paper *Croatia Press* and of the newspaper *Independent State of Croatia* (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*).

Some militiamen were transferred from Hungary to Italy following repeated incidents of insubordination and acts of violence caused by Gustav Perčec's amorous escapades, which had stirred up the camp of Jankapuszta. The situation had come to a head in September 1933, when one of Perčec's lovers, Jelga Pogorelec, to whom he had been unfaithful, revealed to the newspaper *Novosti*, based in Zagreb, everything she knew about the camp in Jankapuszta. Jealousy was part of the problem, but behind these events there was the shrewd hand of the Yugoslav secret police inspector Vladeta Milićević, an Ustaša-hunter who had enrolled Jelga's sister as his spy.⁷¹ Pavelić and the Italian authorities came to the camp's rescue, and the task of replacing Perčec—albeit tactfully, for he was after all one of the movement's leading figures—fell upon Vjekoslav Servatzy. After coordinating the Lika operation, the latter had acquired Italian citizenship and become a “functionary of the prefecture of Fiume.” The Yugoslav foreign affairs minister had asked the Italian government to remove him for being a “dangerous terrorist,” and the Italian authorities had sent him to Trieste.⁷²

With an appropriate security detail by his side, Pavelić continued to travel, abroad as well as in Italy. In March 1933, through the good offices of the Hungarian foreign affairs minister, he had been able to conclude an agreement with the Kosovo Committee to join forces against the common enemy. On 24 July, in Zurich, he managed to strike another deal with the Hungarian Revisionist League presided by Tibor Eckhardt, setting the future boundaries between Hungary and the independent Croatian state.⁷³

⁷¹ See Milićević, *L'assassinat du Roi Alexandre I à Marseille*.

⁷² Centre Historique des Archives Nationales (henceforth CHAN), Fonds dit “Pantheon,” F/7/15926/1, folder 5, page 562.

⁷³ Regarding the two deals, see Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i ustaše*, 116–17.

THE TERRORIST ATTACK IN ZAGREB

In 1933, festivities for the birthday of the Queen Mother of Yugoslavia, the fifth anniversary of the Yugoslav union, and the king's own birthday were all set to take place in December. In a show of affection for his Croatian subjects, as well as of confidence in the face of his opponents, King Alexander decided he wanted to celebrate the three events jointly in Zagreb, during a two-day visit. On his arrival on 11 December, calm reigned supreme in the city, under the watchful eye of the police and the army. Maček and Trumbić were serving a few years in jail, Pribićević had fled to London, and Pavelić's Ustasha, after the setback suffered at Jankapuszta, had yet to crop up again. Still, whenever the monarch went out to meet the crowd, he wore a steel corset under his uniform. To offer festive greetings to the rulers, government authorities had mobilized the Orthodox community and made arrangements for the Catholic one to stay home. When the king's car arrived in Jelačić Square, it was welcomed by singing crowds. Blended in with the throng of people, a lanky man in his twenties from Vela Luka, Petar Oreb, stood with his hands deeply buried in his pockets, holding two grenades, which he was ready to throw as he had been taught to do at the training camp in Vischetto. Two other Ustashes were nearby: Herenčić, who served as an instructor for the Nucleus and had accompanied the aspiring regicide to Zagreb, and Begović, a student who had welcomed them into his house. Immediately after Oreb struck, Begović was to throw a bomb among the people present at the event to spread panic and allow the three of them to flee. When the royal car reached the center of the square, a swarm of children ran toward Alexander, who leaned out to embrace them. Oreb had sworn to Pavelić that he would kill the tyrant, but the sight of the children petrified him. Begović suggested that he throw the bomb toward the military band behind the royal car, but Oreb refused.

Having left the square, the three started making new plans. The same attack could be attempted the next day, in front of the cathedral,

and if that failed too, they still had the option of blowing up the officers' club during the ceremony for the king's birthday. Herenčić, who had to leave Zagreb, exhorted them to act heroically. Begović went home with Oreb, and summoned another aspiring Ustasha, Podgorelec, a student, who that same evening took his oath "before the candles, bomb and pistol." Begović would carry out the attempt on the king's life, and the other two would deal with the escape. During the night, the prefecture of Zagreb learned that three terrorists were hiding in a residence on Štosova Ul. 4, and, at dawn, the police burst into the apartment. Oreb fired two shots, killing a policeman and injuring another, and managed to run away. Immediately taken into custody, Begović and Podgorelec provided a detailed description of the fugitive, who was arrested that same day by a police patrol in Velika Gorica. Forced to reveal everything he knew, Petar Oreb told the police that six months earlier he had left Croatia and secretly reached Trieste to join the Ustasha. After taking his oath, he had gone to Borgotaro along with the others. Two months later, they had relocated to the mountains of Vischetto, where they had been joined by 150 more Ustasas. They learned to throw bombs and to shoot on Mount Grezzo. Pavelić had been there to visit several times, either alone or with Perčec, Budak, Perčević, and others. On 8 December, Oreb had been chosen for a mission in Yugoslavia, and he had left with Herenčić as his guide. In the organization's office in Piacenza, they had told him that he was to make an attempt on the king's life, that everything had been planned, including his escape, and that once back he "would receive a \$500,000 reward."⁷⁴

News of the three arrests remained secret until the sovereign returned to Belgrade. On 20 December, Minister Purić told Ambassador Galli, in confidence, that the bombers had come from Italy, by way of Austria, and that "five more individuals who had reached Cro-

74 AMAE, Série Contrôle des étrangers, Supplément, vol. 126, Procureur de l'Etat du Tribunal pour la Défense de l'Etat. Belgrade, le 19 mars 1934. Acte d'accusation D. T. Nr. 2126/33, 104 and 108.

atia for the same criminal objective were actively being sought.”⁷⁵ The investigation was conducted in utmost secrecy, but the Yugoslav government—in an attempt to corner Italy—was leaking this information through every country’s diplomatic representatives. France and Great Britain tried to mediate for the sake of peace. Austria and Hungary were forced to take at least some anti-Ustasha measures, if for no other reason than to save face. Italy denied all charges. On 18 March 1934, the Belgrade’s State Defense Court started its preliminary investigations, and from that time on newspapers began reporting on the event. Words that made the rounds all over the world were the ones spoken by Oreb during his questioning in court: “Italy spent more to fund the Ustasha than it did for its own army.”⁷⁶ While the accused had doubtless exaggerated, he had certainly painted a vivid picture.

⁷⁵ DDI, 7th series, vol. 14, doc. 493, 553.

⁷⁶ DDI, 9th series, vol. 6, doc. 935, 877. On 28 March 1934, Begović, Oreb and Pogorelec were sentenced to death. One day before the execution was to take place, Pogorelec’s sentence was commuted to life in jail (Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret*, 303).

The Regicide

THE NEW INTERNATIONAL SITUATION

After the attempt on his life in Zagreb, King Alexander was offered support in the Balkans and in the West alike, and strengthened his alliances on both fronts. On 9 February 1934, the Balkan Pact was signed in Athens, establishing a principle of nonaggression and mutual defense among Turkey, Greece, Romania, and Yugoslavia. The four countries would have liked for Bulgaria to enter the pact as well. One of its clauses included “armed bands that pass from one territory to another” in the list of aggressors,¹ and the presence of the IMRO throughout Bulgaria made this provision impracticable for Sofia’s government. Nevertheless, the government and monarch alike were manifesting signs of increased friendship toward Yugoslavia. These would ultimately result in the expulsion of the IMRO from Bulgaria and force Vance Mihailov to take refuge in Turkey.

During the first months of 1934, the French ambassador in Belgrade, Paul Emile Naggiar, repeatedly invited the king of Yugoslavia to Paris on behalf of his government, as a way to reinforce the friendship pacts between their two countries. Yet Alexander stalled. On the one hand, the king did not want to do something that might upset Mussolini, because he still hoped the Duce would rein in Pavelić. On the other hand, and this was a new element within Belgrade’s internation-

1 AMAE, Série Cabinet du Ministre 1771-1940/Sous-série Origines-1939, vol. 102 Documents isolées (Barthou), janv.-déc. 1934, 160.

al policy, his trip to Paris could have been construed as manifesting an “anti-German stance,” which Yugoslavia wanted to “avoid taking.”² As the following note illustrates, the Quai d’Orsay itself realized that a new protector was coming into play: “The growing antagonism between German and Italian politics in Central Europe has pushed the Reich’s government to try to exploit the latent tension that continues to rule over the relations between Italy and Yugoslavia.”³ As a matter of fact, Germany and Yugoslavia were already moving closer. A German delegation was carrying out negotiations in Belgrade for long-term agreements involving increased agricultural exports to Germany and industrial imports into Yugoslavia, as well as “the employment of Yugoslav labor in Germany, and German labor in Yugoslavia.” Ambassador Galli pointed out to Mussolini that Italy would suffer an economic loss from this, that is, a drop in its own industrial exports to Yugoslavia and agricultural exports to Germany. What’s more, improved commercial relations between Berlin and Belgrade would also “inevitably [produce] political effects and value.” If Italy failed to change its policies toward Belgrade, Galli maintained, Yugoslavia would prefer the Anschluss to Italian supremacy in the Balkan–Danubian area. A Yugoslav–German deal, Galli said in conclusion, would usher in “strong German influence over all of the Balkans.”⁴

The Anschluss was becoming a nightmare for Mussolini. Reporting from Rome, the journalist Henry de Jouvenel wrote to the Quai d’Orsay: “Mr. Mussolini is too bright not to realize that the day the Germans are in Klagenfurt will be the day Trieste is very seriously threatened, and that a strong Germany on Italy’s northern borders will weigh a lot more heavily on its economy and politics than a weak and more or less disarmed Austria ever could.”⁵

2 DDI, 7th series, vol. 15, doc. 3, 3.

3 AMAE, Série Cabinet du Ministre 1771–1940, 154.

4 DDI, 7th series, vol. 15, doc. 28, 28–29.

5 AMAE, Série: Papiers 1940/Papiers Charles Rochat, vol. 19, 56.

The Regicide

France and England too were hostile to the Anschluss, and in February 1934 had signed, alongside Italy, a declaration in favor of Austria's independence. At the same time, they put pressure on Belgrade to come to an agreement with Rome that might defuse tensions in the Balkans and allow the establishment of a broad common front against Hitler. Yet King Alexander answered: "How can one have faith in Mussolini? He offers continuous reassurances of his good will [and then] sends people in to assassinate me."⁶

Between March and May 1934, German efforts to create friendly relations with Yugoslavia multiplied: Ernst Roehm traveled to the Dalmatian coast, a group of Yugoslav journalists were flown into Berlin, Goering paid a visit to King Alexander, and finally a commercial treaty the government of Belgrade deemed "greatly beneficial for Yugoslavia" was ratified.⁷

RELOCATING THE NUCLEUS

On the morning of 22 January 1934, on the eve of a Little Entente conference in Zagreb, a bomb exploded in one of the cars of the Berlin-Zagreb train, killing three passengers and injuring one. The bomb was meant for the Romanian and Czechoslovakian foreign affairs ministers, who had changed route at the last minute. The court minister, Antić, went to protest with Galli on behalf of the Yugoslav government, telling him "a ringleader of the Croatian opposition abroad who resided in Italy" had indicated in advance that the attack would take place speaking "in a circle of people." Galli answered that hearsay was not proof. Antić replied that more than enough proof had emerged from the inquiry on the failed regicide. The police had found the names of the Italian sites revealed by Oreb on its maps, and identified the names and faces of the people mentioned by the accused in its records.

6 *Documents Diplomatiques Français* (henceforth DDF), 1st series, vol. 5, doc. 161, 317.

7 AMAE, Série Cabinet du Ministre 1771-1940, 155.

Galli wrote to Mussolini that it would have been expedient to remove “the most hot-tempered Croatian ringleaders” from Italy, and even exhorted him to speak on the radio. Indeed, news in Croatian aired daily from Italian broadcasting stations along the Adriatic coast was one of the most effective means of Ustasha propaganda. But Mussolini only committed to evacuating the Ustasha camp of Vischetto, whose existence Oreb had revealed to the Yugoslav police.⁸

Between 6 and 7 February, the Nucleus was transferred to Oliveto, a small town in the province of Arezzo, where the newcomers were presented as Albanian refugees. Inspector Conti had rented a villa with a park, which he had transformed into barracks with training grounds. Discipline was strict, and the Ustasha were not allowed to leave the village. A special police service was on the lookout for “people suspected of espionage” that might be present in the area.⁹ In April, Pavelić went to Oliveto, “together with some superior officers [who had] arrived from abroad specifically” to attend the Nucleus’s tactical exercises, which even included the “firing of machine guns.”¹⁰

While the Nucleus trained for war, Pavelić and Cortese proceeded to restructure the network, also compromised by the information Oreb had disclosed. Rather than from Chiasso, new recruits started entering Italy from Domodossola. For the purpose of communication with the outside world, a new post office box was set up in Lugano, while the immigration center was moved from Milan to Bologna. The Ustasha headquarters was established in Turin, where Pavelić had been living with his wife and children since October 1933, using a residence permit issued to the Yugoslav citizen “Suicbenk Giovanni.”¹¹ The command was divided into three sections: organization, finances, and military, directed by Mijo Bzik, Eugen-Dido Kvaternik, and Josip Milković, respectively. A delegation was set up in Milan and placed in the care of

8 DDI, 7th series, vol. 14, doc. 596, 682–83.

9 ACS, DGPS/AEC, b. 7/40-1-2, 26 March 1934.

10 ACS, DGPS/AEC, b. 7/40-1-2, 15 April 1934.

11 AMAE, Série Contrôle des étrangers, Supplément, vol. 127, 170.

Stanko Hranilović, and four branches were opened in Trieste, Zadar (Zara), Rijeka (Fiume), and Lastovo (Lagosta).

Toward the end of May, the Yugoslav ambassador in Rome, Jovan Dučić, told the foreign affairs undersecretary, Fulvio Suvich, that the Yugoslav government was “perfectly aware” of the fact that Ustasha camps continued to be present in Italy.¹² Inspector Conti was immediately put in charge of finding new sites for the Nucleus, which could perhaps be split into groups to be assigned to “reforestation tasks.”¹³ Early in July, a new alarm was sounded. Two functionaries of the Yugoslav embassy in the Vatican arrived in Arezzo in a diplomatic car and spent the night in the hotel Chiavi d’Oro, where they provided their true personal details. The morning after, as they headed to Siena on back roads, they stopped in Oliveto to fill up on gas “600 or 700 meters from the villa the group lived in.”¹⁴ Evidently, the purpose of this expedition hadn’t been to expose the base, but to let the Italian authorities know that the Yugoslav government was aware of it.

Two weeks later, the Nucleus left Oliveto. It started its march at night, arriving near the train station in Bucine by dawn. It spent the whole day hiding in the woods. Men and weapons were dispatched on a special train late that night. In Florence, cars carrying 150 Italian army camp tents were added to the train. Going through Bologna, the convoy reached the Adriatic coast, proceeded south past Pescara, and arrived in San Demetrio, in Abruzzo, on the morning of 19 July. Introduced as workers appointed to carry out reforestation tasks, the 420 Ustashes were accommodated in the tents, pitched in a farm enclosed with walls, and later in several houses in San Demetrio and two neighboring towns. Training was suspended, and uniforms replaced by clothes made of canvas.

A team of Ustasha had stayed behind in Oliveto, and for a few months continued to operate the press. From Turin, Pavelić moved to

¹² DDI, 7th series, vol. 15, doc. 318, 340.

¹³ ACS, DGPS/AEC, b. 7/40-1-2, 11 June 1934.

¹⁴ DDI, 7th series, vol. 15, doc. 518, 548.

the coast of Abruzzo, where he spent the summer with his family in a small villa in the town of Francavilla al Mare. In addition to everything else, Inspector Conti also had to deal with the trail of debts the Ustasha left behind. Even Pavelić bought on credit, and Conti, in his expense account, included “an arrears of about 100,000 lire with Commander Angelini of Trieste for the supply of special weapons and ammunition.”¹⁵ We shall see shortly what Inspector Conti meant by calling the weapons and ammunition “special.”

TOWARD MARSEILLES

Appointed foreign affairs minister in February 1934, Louis Barthou took it upon himself to promote an Eastern Pact between Russia and Poland, aimed at the reinforcement of French hegemony in the whole region to the detriment of German advances. As for Italy, Barthou favored the Rome–Vienna–Budapest axis, because of its anti-Anschluss function, but also wanted Rome to reach a peaceful agreement with Yugoslavia, an essential requisite for balance in the Balkans. For months now, diplomatic negotiations had been in the works between France and Italy to reach a general agreement, which was also supposed to solve conflicts between the two countries on African colonies. France had already suggested its intention to give Italy free rein in Ethiopia, in exchange for the “settlement of reciprocal interests” in the Balkan–Danubian region.¹⁶ In June, Barthou traveled to the countries of the Little Entente to promote his pact. He received a warm welcome in Bucharest, but met with some resistance in Belgrade. King Alexander had no intention of making a deal with Russia and did not wish to lend himself to harming Germany. However, he accepted Barthou’s invitation to go to Paris in the fall. Every time Mussolini’s name was mentioned, the king changed the subject, but Barthou managed to get

¹⁵ ACS, DGPS/AEC, b. 5/6, 31 August 1934.

¹⁶ De Felice, *Mussolini il duce*, I, 508.

the attention he wanted from Minister of Foreign Affairs Jevtić, who claimed he was ready “to examine Italian–Yugoslav relations with a will to find an agreement,” as long as Italy put an end to its affair with Pavelić.¹⁷ At the beginning of July, Barthou went to London to present his plan. The British government was favorable, but wanted the Eastern Pact to be submitted to Germany as well, so that the latter might enjoy “equality of rights in a regime of security for all nations.”¹⁸ Barthou accepted London’s request, as did Mussolini, who in exchange for his support obtained a revision in his favor of the borders between Libya and Sudan from the British government. It seemed as if the Four-Power Pact, promoted by Mussolini the year before to ease up tensions in Europe, was bearing fruit. But Hitler had other plans in mind.

On 25 July, Austrian national socialists, whom Dollfuss had outlawed, attempted a coup. The putsch failed, but a Nazi squad managed to gain access to the chancellery in Vienna, and kill Engelbert Dollfuss. Mussolini received this news while in Riccione, where Dollfuss’s wife and children were staying as his guests, and mobilized four divisions to the border region between the Brenner Pass and Tarvisio Pass. Mussolini feared King Alexander might side with Hitler and show up to support the rebels. Thus, “rather than toward the Brenner,” he directed his troops “toward Tarvisio, so that if necessary they could be used in Carinthia against the Yugoslavs, and not only against the Germans.”¹⁹

Hitler immediately denied Germany’s involvement in the putsch, but it was hard to believe him. A few days later, Mussolini told Prince Starhemberg: “Hitler is Dollfuss’s assassin. Hitler is the culprit.”²⁰ Dollfuss hadn’t only been an obstinate opponent of the Anschluss—he had also been the Duce’s pet. His political program, a Christian social state based on corporatism, had been Mussolini’s first success on his path toward the “fascistization” of Europe. Now, if Hitler managed

17 DDI, 7th series, vol. 15, doc. 459, 486.

18 DDI, 7th series, vol. 15, doc. 519, 549.

19 De Felice, *Mussolini il duce*, I, 513.

20 Salvemini, *Preludio alla seconda guerra mondiale*, 318. Ernt Ruediger Starhemberg was Dollfuss’s vice chancellor.

to put his hands on Austria and to cement Germany's alliance with Yugoslavia, Mussolini would have found that his path toward the Danube and the Balkans alike was barred. During the first weeks of August, while Mussolini and Suvich were negotiating with their Austrian allies to instate a new anti-Nazi cabinet, the Yugoslav government protested in Geneva against any kind of unilateral measure, and requested that the League of Nations deal with the Austrian matter. On 21 August, the new Austrian chancellor, Shuschnigg, went to Florence to thank Mussolini for saving Austria. The Italian troops were still deployed on the border, and King Alexander ordered his chief of staff to "intensify all preparations and protection measures" on the Italian–Austrian Front.²¹ Yugoslavia withdrew from Bari's Fiera del Levante and stopped procedures to create an Italian–Yugoslav economic committee, underway for a year. Tensions between Yugoslavia and Italy certainly had to do with their divergence of opinions on Austria, but on those same days, on the occasion of a Slavic associations congress in Zagreb, the Ustasha had carried out dozens of bombings.²² And the Yugoslav government, complaining to Ambassador Galli, proved to be perfectly abreast of Italian and Hungarian support to Croatian and Macedonian terrorism.²³ Still, Rome found the way to throw back these accusations. After the failed putsch, about 2,000 Austrian Nazis obtained political asylum in Yugoslavia; the Italian press spoke out against Belgrade's protective behavior toward Austrian Nazis and launched a campaign against the danger of "incursions into Austria by Nazi squads set up in Yugoslavia."²⁴

On 1 September, in the course of a long conversation with Mussolini, Ambassador Galli tried to relieve the tension. He had conducted

21 DDI, 7th series, vol. 15, doc. 724, 771.

22 DDF, 1st series, vol. 7, doc. 272, 401.

23 DDI, 7th series, vol. 15, doc. 702, 744. Purich, who was well informed about the Ustasha camps in Italy and Hungary, spoke with Galli about "what the Bulgarian government had found in the archives of the Macedonian organization concerning the latter's relationship with Italy."

24 DDI, 7th series, vol. 15, doc. 800, 861.

careful investigations and found no proof of either Yugoslav regiments along the border or suspicious behavior on the part of Yugoslav authorities toward Nazi refugees. After all, Galli pointed out with all due respect, faced with the “alleged will to destroy Yugoslav unity attributed to Italy,” it was to be expected that Yugoslavia would seek a protector in Germany. To oppose this pro-German stance, the king’s trust had to be regained and the ground cleared “of anything that might appear to be organized against Yugoslavia.”²⁵

On his way back to Belgrade, Galli found out that, on 28 August, the *San Marco*, a newspaper based in Trieste, had commemorated the anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo and accused the Serbian army of cowardice. While the Serbians had indeed been defeated by the Austro-Hungarian army under Alexander’s leadership, they had also lost 160,000 men on the field, and an additional 90,000 of them had continued the war in Thessaloniki (Salonica) alongside the Italian troops. The newspaper’s characterization was full of malice, and it offended “Serbian pride by attacking something Serbs deemed sacred.” In retaliation, on 9 September, *Vreme*, a newspaper based in Belgrade, published “Answer to the Heroes of Caporetto,” in which it accused the Italian army of cowardice with equal spite. According to Galli, Belgrade’s reaction was certainly the result of injured pride, but should also be construed as an “indirect answer” to a message by Mussolini. Attending the end of his army’s summer maneuvers inland of the Adriatic, the Duce had taken the opportunity to point out the “area’s likeness [to the] Eastern Front.” In Belgrade’s military and political circles, these words had been interpreted “almost as a threat.”²⁶

While the controversy raged on both sides of the Adriatic as to which of the two camps had been the most offensive or menacing, Galli noted an “increased intensity of pro-German demonstrations” in Belgrade. These went hand in hand with “the greatest effort” on the part

²⁵ DDI, 7th series, vol. 15, doc. 757, 808.

²⁶ DDI, 7th series, vol. 15, doc. 787, 845.

of Germany to attract Yugoslavia, or at least to pit it against Italy. As Barthou's visit to Rome scheduled for the end of October drew nearer, Berlin's pressure on Belgrade grew. In his meeting with Mussolini, the French minister would raise the issue of Italian–Yugoslav reconciliation. According to Galli, Berlin offered advantageous terms to Belgrade in order to prevent Yugoslavia from striking a deal that would penalize Nazi Germany's foreign policy as a whole.²⁷

The British ambassador in Belgrade, Sir Neville Henderson, also stepped in to favor an Italian–Yugoslav agreement. Speaking with King Alexander, he expounded the many sound reasons for a “rapprochement” between the two countries on either side of the Adriatic, which would have restored “tranquility to Europe.” The king replied that this had been his objective for many years, but that “the whole matter with the Ustasha” and the failed attempt on his life had engendered a “crisis of distrust” from which he was unable to recover. Speaking with Galli in confidence, the British ambassador suggested a gesture on Mussolini's part would be enough to restore the monarch's trust. King Alexander was to go to Paris soon—by train or, more likely, by boat—and could make a brief stop in Italy, provided the Duce invited him, of course. Henderson firmly believed that only through a “meeting of the two leaders” could the situation be solved, and Galli agreed with him.²⁸

Mussolini had no desire to receive King Alexander in Rome, but had to do something to satisfy the expectations of Paris and London. On 28 September, the Yugoslav government received a “private note” on the Duce's intention to speak “words of friendship” very soon, “to signal the beginning of a new period.” Belgrade thanked and assured Rome that such words would be welcomed “with joy,” and that the entire Yugoslav press would give prominence to the news and comment on it “amiably.”²⁹ Spoken on 6 October, the words were part of a speech delivered in Milan. Mussolini announced that the relationship between

27 DDI, 7th series, vol. 15, doc. 800, 863.

28 DDI, 7th series, vol. 15, doc. 867, 941–42.

29 DDI, 7th series, vol. 16, doc. 6, 7.

France and Italy had improved, and that proof of this would come in the form of Barthou's visit to Rome. As to the relations between Italy and Yugoslavia, he said, despite the "poisonous" controversies that had raged "on the other side of the Adriatic," there was still a chance for an agreement, "for which there exist precise factual conditions."³⁰ The Yugoslav press quoted the sentence, without commenting on it. In view of Mussolini's provocative tone, the government of Belgrade decided to keep quiet and wait for better times.³¹ After all, what could the Duce have been alluding to by speaking of precise factual conditions, other than the elimination of the Croatian question, which he considered a prerequisite?

On 6 October, King Alexander was already aboard the cruiser *Dubrovnik* headed to Marseilles. During the previous days, he had been in Sofia with the Queen Mother. King Boris's warm welcome and the enthusiasm of the crowd in attendance had proved that the "Bulgarian-Yugoslav rapprochement" was starting to bear fruit.³²

THE ATTEMPT ON KING ALEXANDER'S LIFE

On 10 July 1934, the central command of the Ustasha targeted Barthou's travels in the Balkans and delivered a document to the French consulate and to the consulates of the countries that made up the Little Entente in Zagreb. By defending the revisionist aspirations of all oppressed minorities, the Ustasha highlighted the gravity of the Yugoslav condition, in which Serbs, "with France's financial and moral support," had "totally alienated" the Croatian people. Croats would never collaborate with the "Byzantine criminals" of Belgrade, who made martyrs of patriots, with the Entente or with France. "Barthou, the Serbian king Alexander, Beneš, and Titulesco had better not believe they can deceive other peoples at will! Soon enough they will be struck down by

³⁰ De Felice, *Mussolini il duce*, I, 514.

³¹ DDI, 7th series, vol. 16, doc. 26, 28.

³² DDI, 7th series, vol. 16, doc. 20, 22n.

fate! They had better keep their guard up! And at the same time, they must realize that only one war is possible and currently popular with the Croatian people—the war against Belgrade!”³³

On 25 July, Nazis attempted the putsch in Vienna. Confronted with the danger of the Anschluss, which the Berlin–Belgrade axis made more menacing, Mussolini mobilized his army, and Italian–Yugoslav relations deteriorated to the point that threats of war were made. For years, the Duce had supported Pavelić’s plan to kill the Serbian king as the decisive act to trigger the insurrection in Croatia. While no paper trail exists proving that Mussolini gave Pavelić the green light to carry out his plan at that time—after all, such decisions are not often committed to paper—everything that transpired before and after leaves little doubt. And it is plausible that the decision to play the Pavelić card stemmed from Mussolini’s impulse to take revenge for Dollfuss’s death, and pay back Hitler.³⁴

Preparations for the attempt started in August. Pavelić placed the executive direction of the plan in the hands of two exponents of the central command, Eugen-Dido Kvaternik and Mijo Bzik. Rather than to an inexperienced twenty-year-old like Oreb, who had failed in Zagreb, the task of killing the ruler was assigned to the best professional in the group, the Macedonian Vlado Georgijev, a military instructor at the Ustasha camps.³⁵ Aided by an accomplice, Vlado would hit his target using a special weapon, a pistol that could fire bullets in rapid succession, like a small machine gun. The plan was to avoid carnage, and therefore bombs would be used only as a desperate last resort. If the assault carried out by the Macedonian failed, or if a sudden change of plans in the royal trip made it impracticable, a second commando

33 AMAE, Série Contrôle des étrangers, vol. 125, 11–14.

34 Jerzy W. Borejsza suggests as much in *Il fascismo e l'Europa orientale*, 194 and 197.

35 Mihailov’s right-hand man for a decade, Vlado or Veličko Georgijev Kerin (alias Kelemen, Kostov, and so forth) had already raked up two death sentences in Bulgaria, for the assassination of a communist member of parliament in 1924, and for the murder of Naum Tomalevski in 1930. Mihailov lent him to Pavelić as a bodyguard and military instructor at the Ustasha camps.

would come into play. At the end of August, Pavelić and Kvaternik summoned the lawyer Andrija Artuković—who, after directing the Lika operation, worked alongside Servatzy in Hungary—to Milan.³⁶ It was almost a given that the king would end his trip in London, and Artuković set off for England: he would explore the possibility of a third attempt, if the first two were aborted.

The plan was for the terrorists to enter France through the Swiss border, and, between 17 and 23 September 1934, Kvaternik went to Switzerland twice to lay the groundwork.³⁷ In Lausanne, he stopped at several hotels, and made repeated visits to the Swiss Bank and the station's bureau de change, where he bought substantial amounts of French francs, Belgian francs, and dollars.³⁸ Mijo Bzik arrived in Jankapuszta on 20 September and, together with Servatzy, selected the three most expert men available among thirty or so volunteers: Zvonimir Pospíšil, Mijo Kralj, and Ivan Rajić.³⁹ Using fake Hungarian passports, together with Bzik, they set off on their journey, and, on 25 September, in Zurich, met "Mr. Kramer" (that is, Kvaternik) and "the instructor, Kalemén" (that is, Vlado the Macedonian).⁴⁰ All of them spent the night in the city, at the St. Gothard Hotel, with the exception of Bzik, who went on to Lausanne.

On the evening of 26 September, Mijo Bzik crossed the lake aboard a motorboat and reached the French shore with four suitcases containing weapons for the attack. Posing as a bellhop, Bzik took "the luggage" to Mr. and Mrs. Vondraček, who had just arrived in a hotel in Evian, and then withdrew from the scene. The young bride was listed on the hotel register as Marija Vondraček, a Czechoslovakian citizen living in

36 AMAE, Série Contrôle des étrangers, vol. 127, 10–11.

37 AMAE, Série Contrôle des étrangers, vol. 128, 97.

38 CHAN, Fonds dit "Pantheon," F/7/15927/1, Attentat de Marseille, folder 1122, file D, Enquête en Suisse, 1–2.

39 Pospíšil had been sentenced to death in Belgrade for the murder of a policeman and several terrorist attacks; Mijo Kralj, wanted by the Yugoslav police, was an instructor at the camp of Jankapuszta; Ivan Rajić, who had fled his country in 1929, had ended up in Jankapuszta after spending time in Brazil.

40 In *Tribune de Genève*, 14 October 1934.

Trieste. She was blond, attractive, and rather proficient in French. Only her husband's first name, Petar, was noted. He was in his forties, and spoke Italian and "a Slavic language."⁴¹

Meanwhile, the other five men had relocated to Lausanne and spent two nights at the Hôtel des Palmiers. Mr. Kramer (Kvaternik) did not go unnoticed: he was a blond young man, much taller than average, always elegant and well mannered, and spoke French fluently. He took the four to several clothing and shoe stores, and renewed their wardrobes, urging them to remove all tags and labels from their purchases. At the station checkroom, he deposited a suitcase containing the old garments, guns and Hungarian passports of the three men from Jan-ka Pusztá, who would enter France using Czechoslovakian passports. Thanks to a convention between Prague and Paris, Czech citizens did not need to get their passports preapproved by a French consulate—they simply needed to show them at the border crossing.

Petar and Marija Vondraček got to Paris on 28 September and settled in a hotel on Rue St. Anne. The five men split into two groups and entered France on separate trains, through different border crossings. They met at the station of Dijon and continued together to Paris from there. Five Balkan men would perhaps have drawn unwanted attention at the Gare de Lyon, and so they detrained at a small station before Fontainebleau and reached the capital on a tourist bus. Such caution was more than justified. From Belgrade, Ambassador Naggiar had repeatedly insisted with the Quai d'Orsay that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs do everything in its power to ensure that the police take "absolutely special measures" to protect the sovereign.⁴² And the Yugoslav legations in Paris and Brussels kept receiving warnings, promptly forwarded to the French authorities, to the effect that "some Yugoslavs" were preparing an attempt on the king's life, "to be carried out during the sovereign's stay in France."⁴³

41 AMAE, Série Contrôle des étrangers, vol. 127, 141.

42 AMAE, Série Contrôle des étrangers, vol. 125, 15.

43 Ibid., 27. Similar warning came from the Yugoslav embassy in Brussels.

In Paris, three hotels had been booked in different neighborhoods—one for Kramer, one for Vlado and Rajić, and one for Pospišil and Kralj. Kvaternik urged his men to try and attract as little attention as possible. He recommended that they spend little time in cafes and go to the cinema instead. On the evening of 3 October, a Mr. Clark arrived in Rue St. Anne in a diplomatic car, and stayed in the Vondračeks' room for several hours; he was never identified. Likewise, the French police was never able to ascertain the identity of the pretty Marija and of her alleged husband. In fact, the two were Ante Godina, the head of the Ustasha center in Trieste, and his wife, Stana.⁴⁴

King Alexander had boarded the *Dubrovnik*, which was bound for Marseilles, on the evening of 5 October. That same evening, Mr. and Mrs. Vondraček had taken the train to Avignon, carrying the men's four suitcases along with them. On the morning of 7 October, Kvaternik, Vlado, and Kralj also arrived. Rajić and Pospišil stayed put in Paris. From Avignon, the party moved to Aix-en-Provence, always sleeping in separate hotels. On the morning of 8 October, Vlado and Kralj went to Marseilles and inspected the old port and on the Canebière, where the procession would pass. That evening, Kvaternik gave Vlado and Kralj their weapons: each received two pistols, two bombs, and a hundred bullets. At dawn on 9 October, Kvaternik and the Vondračeks left for Paris with four suitcases, two of them empty and two of them full. Vlado and Kralj took a bus to the center of Marseilles, headed for the Canebière, and waited for the king to arrive. Vlado carried out the attempt alone, and died in the process. Kralj returned to his hotel in Aix, hid two bombs and a pistol under his pillow, and kept the other one. He reached Avignon and took the evening train to Paris.

As soon as the radio reported on the attempt, Pospišil and Rajić fled Paris. They spent the night in Fontainebleau and then proceeded toward Switzerland by train. A few hours later, Kralj too arrived at the station

44 Inspector Conti disclosed that the "beautiful Slav" was Stana Godina, Ante's wife, in a "confidential report" (DDI, 9th series, vol. 6, doc. 936, 877).

in Fontainebleau, bought a ticket for Evian, drank a beer, and left an oversized tip. Two policemen witnessed the scene, grew suspicious, and asked him to produce identification. While they inspected his passport, Kralj made a run for the woods, but in the flight dropped a 7.65 Walther magazine from his pocket. A similar weapon and a Czechoslovakian passport had been found on Vlado. This was the first piece of evidence corroborating the idea that the regicide had not worked alone. Pospišil and Rajić arrived in Thonon in the evening, too late to pass the border crossing clandestinely. They got a room in a hotel, presented Czechoslovakian passports, and were arrested in the middle of the night. Kralj wandered in the forest of Fontainebleau for five days, eluding the police. Finally, out of exhaustion, he decided to get rid of his weapon and let himself be arrested in a cafe in Melun. Mr. Kramer/Kvaternik and the Vondračeks/Godinas had vanished into thin air.

THE INQUIRY

The killer died within hours of carrying out his hit. On his arm he bore a tattoo of a skull and the IMRO's motto "Freedom or Death." A Bulgarian informant provided the Quai d'Orsay with a detailed report on relations between the IMRO and Pavelić's Ustasha. Among other things, the report stated that the Croatian organization had its headquarters in Italy and was "largely funded by the Italian government, which supplies money, weapons, and explosives."⁴⁵ The French police still ignored Vlado the Macedonian's true identity, but it did know that "he [had come] from Italy," and that "the identification he had"—that is, the fake Czechoslovakian passport—had been "produced in Italy."⁴⁶

The Parisian police commissioner, Barthelet, appointed to lead the inquiry, started making the rounds of the city's hotels, showing personnel the identification photos provided by the Yugoslav police. By

⁴⁵ AMAE, Série Contrôle des étrangers, vol. 125, 158 and 161 (*verso*).

⁴⁶ DDI, 7th series, vol. 16, doc. 49, 47.

15 October, he had proof that the mysterious Mr. Kramer was Eugen Kvaternik, Pavelić's right-hand man. Pospišil and Rajić's depositions shed light on the Hungarian base from which the three terrorists had set off. Artuković, expelled from Great Britain and arrested in Dieppe by the French police, further clarified the picture. He claimed not to have been involved in the attempt on the king's life, and voiced his opposition to "terrorist acts," but spoke at length of his political dealings with Servatzy, Kvaternik, and Pavelić.⁴⁷

The weapons' provenance was also quickly ascertained. Vlado had used a rapid-fire 7.63 Mauser, and carried a 7.65 Walther PP in his pocket. Kralj had abandoned another Mauser in his hotel room in Aix-en-Provence. Based on the gun serial numbers, the manufacturers were able to establish that the weapons had been sold to Angelini & Bernardon of Triste two years before. The French police asked its Italian counterpart to verify the truth of these findings. The Italian police answered that the company Angelini & Bernardon had in fact verified the purchase of the Mausers, "without being able to say with certainty to whom and on what date" the weapons had been resold.⁴⁸

Meanwhile, an international arrest warrant against Pavelić, Kvaternik, and several other fugitives was issued in Paris. Immediately after the attempt on the king's life, Mussolini assured France and Yugoslavia that Italy would give its full cooperation in the search for the guilty party, but had yet to lift a finger. Now the Italian police was forced to comply with France's request, as the whole world had its eyes on Italy. The head of the police, Arturo Bocchini, solved the problem with his legendary shrewdness. On the evening of 16 October, the central police station in Turin made a list of Yugoslav citizens residing in the city and ordered certain precautionary measures. Two agents called on a Mr. Suicbenk, in Via Bezzecca, found he had "neither a passport nor any other form of identification" and took him to police headquarters,

47 AMAE, Série Contrôle des étrangers, vol. 127, 10 (*verso*) and 11.

48 AMAE, Série Contrôle des étrangers, vol. 128, 47–48.

where, after “close questioning,” he admitted to being Ante Pavelić. The next morning, two policemen stopped a tall, blond, elegant young man who was getting off a train from Milan in Turin’s main station, Porta Nuova. Because “he had neither identification nor a passport,” he was of course taken to police headquarters, where he was recognized as Eugen Kvaternik.⁴⁹ The Havas press agency reported on the two arrests, but the Ministry of Internal Affairs corrected the news. Pavelić and Kvaternik had not been “arrested,” but only “stopped”; Public Security had acted to comply with a request by “the French police,” not on behalf of the judicial authority; the two men would be detained “until the investigation [established] their innocence or guilt”; the custody they were under was tantamount to “mitigated preventive detention”; the men were allowed to “live comfortably in separate rooms and have food brought in from the outside world.”⁵⁰

From Paris, Inspector Royère went to Turin to question the two detained. The chief of police, Stracca, asked Rome for instructions on how to handle the matter, and Suvich himself ordered that “the interrogation be limited drastically.”⁵¹ After a thirty-six-hour wait, the Frenchman was authorized to draft a list of questions; he was not allowed to be present during the questioning and returned to Paris bearing two scanty reports in which Pavelić and Kvaternik rejected all accusations.⁵² On 30 October, the French government asked Italy to extradite the two men, who were being accused before the court of Aix-en-Provence of organizing the crime. Mussolini’s foreign affairs minister replied that such a request would be turned down, according to Article 3 of the French–Italian extradition treaty of 1870, which excluded political crimes. After all, France too availed itself of this clause to deny the extradition of Italian political exiles.⁵³

49 AMAE, *Série Contrôle des étrangers*, vol. 127, 171.

50 AMAE, *Correspondance politique et commerciale 1914–1940/Z-Europe 1918–1940–Yugoslavie 1930–1940* Protocole, vol. 136, 6.

51 Sala, “Le basi italiane del separatismo croato (1929–1941),” 324.

52 AMAE, *Série Contrôle des étrangers*, vol. 127, 165–75.

53 AMAE, *Série Contrôle des étrangers*, vol. 128, 9.

The international arrest warrant also hung over Vjekoslav Servatzy, arrested by the Hungarian police in Budapest on 23 October. A few days later, Radio Belgrade announced that Servatzy had “mysteriously disappeared from the military prison he was detained in,” and the city’s newspaper *Vreme* speculated that he had been killed for knowing too much.⁵⁴ The Hungarian government answered that the detainee had escaped from prison, causing the police to lose track of him. In fact, Servatzy had already left, in good company, on an airplane belonging to the Magyar secret services. Seeing the signs of a storm gathering before him, President Gömbös thought it wise to return his most troublesome guests to his friend Mussolini. At the airport of Casarsa, near Udine, Inspector Conti took Vjekoslav Servatzy and his wife into custody, as well as five instructors from the camp in Jankapuszta, Gustav Perčec, and the latter’s aide and secretary. Mussolini wished for their presence in Italy to remain “particularly covert.” Conti traveled with them to the opposite end of the Italian peninsula, and arranged their stay in Longobucco, in the Sila Mountains.⁵⁵

Since the day of the king’s murder, Inspector Conti had not known a moment’s peace. To “erase all traces of the person who executed the regicide from Italy,” he confiscated lists of Ustasha soldiers bearing Vlado’s name from several police stations, a medical record from when he was hospitalized, a contract for the purchase of a car, a photograph of the Macedonian instructor with his recruits displayed in an *osteria* in Borgotaro, and so forth. But Conti did not only deal with the matter of Vlado. Of the many operations he conducted, the one he considered “of the greatest import” was “the retrieval of the much-discussed three passports,” that is, the ones Kramer (Kvaternik) and the Vondračeks (Ante and Stana Godina) had used to return to Italy.⁵⁶

Despite the careful sanitization carried out by Inspector Conti and the protection he offered the people most responsible for the crime,

⁵⁴ Ibid., 207.

⁵⁵ DDI, 9th series, vol. 6, doc. 936, 877.

⁵⁶ ACS, DGPS/AEC, b. 7/40-1-2, 26 November 1934.

who were thus able to evade justice, the French inquiry continued to amass evidence of Italy's involvement in the attempt on the king's life. Rather than make such evidence public, however, the government of Paris preferred to censor it. Likewise, it concealed the results of Inspector Imbert's inquiry into the responsibilities of the French authorities and police for the events of Marseilles.

"Photography and the cinema have broadcast the spectacle of what the security service did against the crowd," Imbert wrote.⁵⁷ An American cameraman had filmed the whole ceremony in Marseilles, starting when the king disembarked the cruiser and continuing right up to his murder. The picture was screened in several theaters, creating such a sensation that the French police was forced to seize it. The *New York Times* correspondent saw it in London and called it clear proof of the negligence of the police in Marseilles.⁵⁸ Inspector Imbert ascertained that the controller general of the Sûreté Nationale, Sisteron, had arrived in Marseilles on 1 October to arrange safety measures in the city, gone on vacation the following day, and returned a week later, on the evening before the event. The next morning, on 9 October, there were supposed to be policemen every two meters along the Canebière, but instead agents were spread at six-meter intervals for lack of personnel. To protect the royal car—a convertible with its top down—the prefect had arranged for twelve policemen mounted on bicycles to flank the vehicle, six on each side. At the old port, the cycling policemen had lined up on either side of the car as planned, but then Sisteron had screamed that the crowd needed to be able to see the king, insisting that they move to the head and tail of the procession. After the king's murder, chaos had broken loose. Sisteron's responsibility, Imbert wrote, had been "direct, heavy, tragic."

57 CHAN, F/7/13981, Responsabilités encorues dans l'assassinat de Marseille, Rapport n. 1 du 30 octobre 1934 rédigé par l'Inspecteur Imbert de la Sûreté Nationale, 10.

58 AMAE, Série Contrôle des étrangers, vol. 125, 152. The scandal produced by the movie forced the internal affairs minister Sarraut to resign; his successor opened the inquiry assigned to Imbert.

The Regicide

Inspector Imbert filed a second report, concerning the causes of Louis Barthou's death. Wounded superficially near his left elbow, the old foreign affairs minister had been able to get out of the car on his own two feet. An agent had bandaged his arm, without realizing that the bullet had in fact also severed his brachial artery. In the chaos, he had reached the hospital two hours later, dying as a result of hemorrhage. On the morning of 10 October, in the courtyard of the Hôtel de police, staff from the science laboratory examined the royal car. Inside the Délage, Imbert wrote, "an 8-mm bullet made of red copper was found beneath the backrest of the seat Barthou was sitting in." The bullet was identical to the ones used by the *gardiens de la paix*, the metropolitan police agents, who, immediately after the king was shot, fired their weapons in all directions, killing and injuring several people in the crowd. Dr. Bérout, the science laboratory director, concluded that Barthou's death was caused by "a metropolitan police officer's bullet."⁵⁹ This amounted to a disastrous verdict against the law enforcement agency, already under harsh attack. Further, Bérout's report arrived on the investigating magistrate's table when the international arrest warrants for two murders had already been issued. By then, the country's judicial and political authorities could not retract or rectify their accusations, for to do so would have covered all of France with ridicule. Bérout's report was covered up amid the case papers, and Inspector Imbert's inquiry was archived by the internal affairs minister.⁶⁰

THE CONSEQUENCES

As soon as it was informed of the king's assassination, the Yugoslav police increased safety measures. Before the radio and papers even broadcast the news, hundreds of subversives were placed under arrest in Za-

59 CHAN, F/7/13981, Responsabilités encorues dans l'assassinat de Marseille, 6.

60 Bérout's report was made known by De Launay, *Secrets diplomatiques (1939-1945)*. See also Broche, *Assassinat de Alexandre Ier et Louis Barthou*, 166-68. We have no knowledge of Imbert's report ever being cited before today.

greb, and all demonstrations were prohibited. Vladko Maček, who had been in prison for the past few years, urged the leading cadres of the Peasant Party to “appeal particularly to the rural population of the entire region to keep calm, so as not to give the regime any reason to increase the number of victims and arrests.”⁶¹ Indeed, farmers kept calm. According to the Yugoslav police, nine “Croatian terrorists” set off “from Italy and from Austria” in an attempt to get into Yugoslavia and “carry out attacks during King Alexander’s funeral,” but were stopped.⁶² Occasional anti-Italian demonstrations in Zagreb and in Belgrade were subdued. The Yugoslav government wanted the king’s solemn funeral to serve as proof of the regime’s strength and cohesion, and invited the press to set all controversy aside.

Before leaving for France, King Alexander arranged that in the event of his death the regency be placed in the hands of his cousin, Prince Paul, who would be assisted by two guarantors, until his own son Peter (thirteen years old at the time) came of age. Ambassador Galli immediately paid the prince a visit to offer the condolences of the Italian government. Still unaware of all the behind-the-scenes wheeling and dealing, Paul expressed “great appreciation” for this gesture and entreated the ambassador to give Mussolini, whom he knew personally, “his profound and heartfelt thanks for the part taken by Italy in this tragedy.” Paul made reference to the fact that his ancestors had been the princes of Fiesole at the time of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. Deeply saddened by the deterioration of relations between Italy and Yugoslavia, Paul hoped that they might “be eased and lead to an entente.”⁶³

Two days later, the Yugoslav delegate at the League of Nations, Kostantin Fotić, present for the questioning of the first men arrested, sent a “shocking” telegraphic report to Belgrade on Italy’s and Hungary’s responsibility in the tragedy of Marseilles.⁶⁴ Minister of Foreign

61 DDI, 7th series, vol. 16, doc. 43, 43.

62 DDF, 1st series, vol. 7, doc. 466, 734.

63 DDI, 7th series, vol. 16, doc. 35, 38.

64 DDI, 7th series, vol. 16, doc. 47, 46.

Affairs Jevtić started preparing a file on Ustasha and Macedonian terrorism; he would submit it to the League of Nations, implicating Italy and Hungary. “The abominable crime of Marseilles,” Jevtić told Ambassador Naggiar, “proves that political assassination is now one of the methods used by certain governments. If we want to keep peace in Europe, we must put an end to this scandal once and for all.”⁶⁵ Even the prince regent, Paul, wanted all doubts on this matter to be dispelled.

The prince—who had studied in Cambridge and harbored a strong liking for Great Britain—received calls for moderation from London. Yet the Foreign Office questioned his ability to keep the situation in check. The British diplomats feared that Yugoslav leaders might increasingly gravitate to Germany, dragging Romania and Bulgaria into Germany’s sphere of influence, too. Also, it could not be taken for granted that the League of Nations would be able to impose its authority in the face of “national passions.”⁶⁶ Therefore, the English believed it was necessary to favor a rapprochement between Yugoslavia and Italy at all costs. This was what Hitler wanted to avoid, for an understanding between Rome and Belgrade would undermine Yugoslavia’s support of Germany, and strengthen Italy’s position in Eastern Europe. Hermann Goering went to Belgrade to attend the state funeral, and during a press conference he spoke of the friendship between his country and Yugoslavia, assuring his audience that Germany would not tolerate “conspirators in its territory.”⁶⁷

Meanwhile, in Paris, the new foreign affairs minister, Pierre Laval, also gave absolute priority to reaching an agreement with Rome, as Barthou had done before him. Worried by the German rearmament, France wanted to secure an alliance with Italy as quickly as possible and reconcile Belgrade with Rome. To overcome the hurdle posed by the events of Marseilles, the French government compelled the press not to speak of the Italian responsibilities in the terrorist attack.

65 DDF, 1st series, vol. 7, doc. 468, 738.

66 AMAE, Série Contrôle des étrangers, vol. 127, 3.

67 DDF, 1st series, vol. 7, doc. 518, 841.

Mussolini was even more interested in seeing the agreement through than Laval, because the stakes for Italy were France's assent to the launching of the military campaign in Ethiopia, Italy's first step toward conquering its empire. A compromise thus needed to be found on the matter of Yugoslavia, and yet the Duce did not wish to make the first move, nor did he intend to give up the Ustasha deterrent. While he had availed himself of the Ustasha in a subversive capacity up until then, he could now use them to force Belgrade to come to terms. The only urgent measure taken by Italy was to remove weapons from the camp in Abruzzo. It was not a repressive act, but a purely precautionary measure, not unlike the steps taken to retrieve the terrorists' passports, erase Vlado's traces, bring Pavelić and Kvaternik to safety, place Servatzy and Perčec in hiding, and convince the Austrian government to refuse to extradite Perčević. The immigration network continued to work as before, and, in November, 150 Croatian political exiles expelled from Belgium and France took refuge in Italy, where they were "regularly maintained and subsidized" along with the others.⁶⁸ Even the Croatia Office in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs continued to function, but direct contact with Pavelić and management of the Nucleus changed hands. The Yugoslav government circulated rumors that the Ustasha squad in Zurich had received "instructions and money for the attempt [...] by an Italian subject coming from Italy."⁶⁹ Telling Mussolini about this, Ambassador Galli urged him to "send anyone [implicated in the matter] as far away as possible, even if he holds an official post."⁷⁰ Galli did not name any names, but Paolo Cortese was ultimately dispatched to Guatemala as a business representative, and the consul, Quinto Mazzolini, took his place at the helm of the Croatia Office.

At the end of October, a sign of thawing came from Belgrade. Former prime minister Ninčić—who hoped to regain his position at the head of the government leading a coalition of old democratic parties,

68 DDI, 9th series, vol. 6, doc. 936, 877.

69 DDI, 7th series, vol. 16, doc. 57, 51.

70 DDI, 7th series, vol. 16, doc. 60, 58–59.

which were presently undergoing reconstitution—told Galli he “firmly” believed an agreement between Italy and Yugoslavia was in the best interest of “both countries.” Yugoslavia’s leanings were much stronger toward Italy than toward Germany, the Serbian politician said, though the former had made certain “allowances” in the plot against King Alexander and Yugoslavia expected some “satisfaction.”⁷¹

The idea for Operation Lipari—whereby members of the Croatian militia were transferred to the island of Lipari, a known place for the internment of Italian antifascists—developed within this context early in November. France and Yugoslavia would appreciate the gesture, and, in exchange for this, Mussolini would request that Italy be kept out of the trial in Aix-en-Provence and the Yugoslav file for the League of Nations. Inspector Conti went to the immigration center in Bologna and made arrangements for the operation with Mile Budak, the man in charge after Pavelić’s arrest. On 18 November, Conti arrived in San Demetrio, Abruzzo, and initiated the transfer: “After removing their uniforms and wearing civilian clothes, the men boarded onto a special train at night and were transferred to Civitavecchia; from there, they continued to the island of Lipari on a steamboat rented for that purpose.”⁷²

On that same day, the trial against the three accomplices of the regicide—Rajić, Pospišil, and Kralj—started in Aix-en-Provence. Their attorney was Georges Desbons, a Parisian criminal defense lawyer known for his partiality to Croats and Macedonians. As soon as it was his turn to speak, Desbons lashed out at the French government and justice system, claiming that the accused had fallen victim to an international conspiracy, the Yugoslav police had led the inquiry, the investigating magistrate in Marseilles had concealed compromising documents, and so forth.⁷³ The president of the tribunal tried to appease him, but Desbons responded to such attempts by hurling personal in-

⁷¹ DDI, 7th series, vol. 16, doc. 95, 94 and 96.

⁷² ACS, DGPS/AEC, b. 7/40-1-5, 8 July 1936.

⁷³ Broche, *Assassinat de Alexandre Ier et Louis Barthou*, 184.

sults, and the court decided to bar him from trial. The next day, Desbons returned to the courtroom with a following of reporters and photographers. When asked to leave, he replied that he would yield only to force. Finally, three policemen dragged him away. The hearing resumed, but the defendants refused to speak without an attorney present, and they were given a court-appointed lawyer. In order to read up on all the documents relevant to the case, the latter requested an adjournment, which lasted fourteen months.

On 20 November, the French ambassador in Rome, Charles de Chambrun, had a long and cordial exchange with Mussolini on the central issues of the French–Italian pact. The two fully agreed on limiting German armaments and on jointly defending Austria. They also concurred that a reasonable solution would be found for Africa. As for the rapprochement between his country and Yugoslavia, Mussolini claimed to be willing to make “a conciliatory gesture,” but said no one could expect him to act so long as he was under threat of “a Yugoslav provocation in Geneva.”⁷⁴ De Chambrun was told about the political exiles’ relocation to the “islands of Lipari.” Also, Mussolini professed his readiness to have Pavelić and Kvaternik “tried before an Italian court of law,” as soon as the French government supplied him with “enough evidence” for judicial action.⁷⁵ De Chambrun reported back to Laval as follows: “The Croats’ isolation may be viewed as a first step in the right direction; if signs of a détente should come from Belgrade, a more explicit conciliatory gesture may well be set forth by Rome.”⁷⁶

Laval started pressuring Jevtić, while the British government intervened with Paul to discourage him from carrying out Yugoslavia’s protest in Geneva. The Council of the League of Nations gathered in a special session on 5 December 1934. Jevtić presented a memorandum listing all the terrorist attacks conducted by political exiles based in Hungary starting from 1930, and all of the Yugoslav government’s

⁷⁴ DDF, 1st series, vol. 8, doc. 100, 135.

⁷⁵ DDF, 1st series, vol. 8, doc. 97, 131.

⁷⁶ DDF, 1st series, vol. 8, doc. 100, 136.

protestations, which had fallen on deaf ears in Budapest. He maintained that the camp in Jankapuszta had been built “with the cooperation of Hungarian authorities,” and denounced the latter’s “complicity” in the repeated attempts to destabilize Yugoslavia, right up to King Alexander’s murder.⁷⁷ Throughout the long speech, Italy was never mentioned. With feigned candor, the Italian delegate Pompeo Aloisi took on Hungary’s defense. This was a precise commitment Gombös had managed to secure from Mussolini by reminding him that, if Hungary was cast aside and left to fend for itself, it would seek comfort in Germany.⁷⁸ Eden and Laval got the message, and supported Aloisi. After exhausting mediation efforts, the council came to a close on the evening of 10 December, when it set forth a resolution proposed by Eden that was met with general approval. Even the parties directly concerned—the Hungarian Eckhardt and the Yugoslav Jevtić—voted in favor of the resolution. The matter of Hungary’s involvement in the attacks was solved thus: after acknowledging that some Hungarian authorities had perhaps assumed, albeit through negligence, a certain responsibility for acts relative to the preparation of the terrorist attack in Marseilles, the council expressed its hope that the Hungarian government would bear its international duties in mind, and promptly take appropriate measures against those authorities, once their responsibility was ascertained.⁷⁹ Pompeo Aloisi sent Mussolini a telegraph: “This solution [...] provided another solemn demonstration that Italy stands too high for anyone to dare touch it, liberated Hungary from all its nightmares, and, lastly, dispelled a dangerous cloud from the international horizon.”⁸⁰

More than a year went by before the regicide in Marseilles was addressed again in France. The court in Aix-en-Provence assembled on 5 February 1936, quickly settling the matter. In the attorney general’s fi-

77 “Discours prononcé par M. Jevtić à la S.D.N., Genève, le 7 décembre 1934.”

78 DDI, 7th series, vol. 16, doc. 112, 121–22.

79 “Résolution formulée par M. Eden le 10 décembre 1934.”

80 DDI, 7th series, vol. 16, doc. 271, 286.

nal address Italy was never mentioned. The verdict was read on 12 February. Vlado's three accomplices were condemned to forced labor for life, while Pavelić, Kvaternik, and Perčec were singled out as the crime's instigators and organizers and sentenced to death in absentia.

THE FASCIST REGIME'S RESPONSIBILITY

In August 1944, two months after Rome was liberated, High Commissioner Mario Berlinguer, the head of the High Court for the Punishment of Fascist Crimes, received a police report in which Fulvio Suvich, the foreign affairs undersecretary between 1932 and 1936, was charged with "complicity in keeping Fascism in power," and accused of "being associated with the murders of King Alexander of Yugoslavia and Minister Barthou," committed in Marseilles ten years before. Berlinguer issued an arrest warrant against Suvich, and assigned the investigation to Judge Italo Robino. Questioned by the latter, Suvich "burst into tears" and denied everything.⁸¹ A few days later, the examining magistrate heard General Cesare Amé, the head of the SIM between 1940 and 1943. Amé had no recollection of the facts under investigation, but spoke of "secret documents belonging to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs" hidden in August 1943 "in the catacombs of S. Agnese," which he committed to finding in order to supply the judge with more information.⁸²

Consul General Quinto Mazzolini, who had replaced Cortese at the helm of the Croatia Office late in 1934, was interrogated on 20 August. Mazzolini said the attempt on King Alexander's life had "undoubtedly been arranged in Italy, with the complicity of government officials." He explained that Pavelić and his men had been in contact with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs through "the legation counselor Paolo Cortese," and that the latter "could not have acted of

81 Conti, *Servizio segreto*, 15.

82 ASP, Acts of the so-called "Roatta trial," Perugia's Court of Appeals, criminal trials 1026/1-2-3-4, folder 1, file III K2, 1 and verso.

his own volition, but in accord with the cabinet,” that is, with Mussolini, Suvich, the head of the cabinet, Pompeo Aloisi, and his second-in-command, Francesco Jacomoni. Two days later, the witness returned to Robino and made some additional statements, which reduced Suvich’s involvement and pointed to the head of the police, Arturo Bocchini, and Inspector Ercole Conti as being responsible for the management of the Ustasha in Italy.⁸³

When questioned, Pompeo Aloisi admitted to having presided over the cabinet from 1932 to 1936 along with Suvich, but clarified that in his capacity as leader of the Italian delegation at the League of Nations he had almost always been in Geneva during that time. Aloisi ruled out the idea that Suvich and Jacomoni might have played “a part” in the Marseilles plot and confirmed that diplomatic contacts with the Croatian group were maintained by Paolo Cortese, “who acted in accord with the head of police.” Judge Robino needed proof, and the Cortese–Bocchini–Conti line of investigation seemed like the most promising lead. But the head of the police had died in 1940, and Paolo Cortese was interned in a concentration camp in Germany.⁸⁴ Conti had retired in 1942 with the honorary title of prefect of the kingdom. He lived in Pisa and replied to the summons with a “sick note” from his doctor. Thus, the judge questioned police functionaries and commissioners who had worked for Bocchini, but this proved useless: while Bocchini had enjoyed direct contact with Mussolini and even had private dealings with Cortese and the SIM, only Inspector Conti had been involved in the management of the Ustasha camps.

Once again, Robino summoned General Amé. The former head of the SIM still had not retrieved the hidden documents and could therefore offer little help. Yet he did raise the following point with the judge: why be so intent on establishing the Italian Ministry of Foreign Af-

⁸³ Ibid., 2.

⁸⁴ In the summer of 1943, Cortese served as minister plenipotentiary before the legation in Bratislava; when the Italian Social Republic was established, Cortese remained faithful to Badoglio’s government, and the Germans interned him in a camp, along with his family and the legation staff.

fairs's political responsibility for a crime committed by Croats, and not focus instead on punishing those responsible for crimes of blood truly ascribable to Fascism? For instance, the plot to assassinate the Rosselli brothers, two famed antifascist activists slain in France, had been hatched in Italy. In the SIM, "people spoke of the assassination of the Rosselli brothers," Amé said, "and believed Colonel Emanuele was informed of the facts."⁸⁵ Brought before the judge, Santo Emanuele acknowledged his responsibility for the killing of Carlo and Nello Rosselli, which had taken place in Bagnoles-de-l'Orne on 9 June 1937. He had received the order for the murder from General Paolo Angioi, head of the SIM at the time. Emanuele, who led the counterespionage section, had relayed the command to Major Roberto Navale, head of counterespionage in Turin, who in turn had used French *cagouleurs* to carry out the murder. The SIM was fully subjugated to Fascism at the time, Emanuele pointed out, and the instigators of the crime had been Minister of Foreign Affairs Galeazzo Ciano, and the head of the latter's cabinet, Filippo Anfuso.⁸⁶

The judge opened a new investigation into the murder of the Rosselli brothers, which absorbed him completely. As for the terrorist attack in Marseilles, no further relevant evidence was acquired. In December, the high commissioner formalized the inquiry and consolidated the two actions into one. Incontrovertible evidence on the killing of the Rosselli brothers—as well as on other crimes, perpetrated during the Spanish Civil War—was unearthed in the SIM archives, and the High Court used it to inflict harsh punishments.⁸⁷ When it came to the events of Marseilles, the prosecutor's case was far weaker. No evidence was found pointing to Suvich's or Jacomoni's direct responsibil-

85 ASP, Acts of the so-called "Roatta trial," Perugia's Court of Appeals, folder 1, file III K2, 13 September 1944. Santo Emanuele, a lieutenant colonel of the Carabinieri, had entered the SIM's counterespionage section in 1934, serving under Colonel Piéche. After replacing the latter in August 1935, he led counterespionage for five years.

86 Santo Emanuele's questionings dated 16, 17, and 18 September 1944 are in ASP, Acts of the so-called "Roatta trial," Perugia's Court of Appeals, folder 2, file K2-bis 6, 1-7.

87 For the proceedings of the trial and the verdict dated 12 March 1945, see *Il Processo Roatta*.

ity; nevertheless, they were sentenced to fifteen years in jail for contributing to keeping Fascism in power. As to Paolo Cortese, the High Court found “no adequate evidence to indicate” his involvement in “the preparation or execution of the crimes.” Still, the court sentenced him to twelve years in jail for his complicity in the “expansionist aims of Fascist Italy,” in his capacity as the organizational leader of the Usta-sha camps.⁸⁸ Defendants in both cases, the one for the assassination of King Alexander and the one for the murder of the Rosselli brothers, appealed against the High Court’s convictions, and after a long and convoluted trial were acquitted by the Court of Appeals of Perugia in 1949.⁸⁹ A scandal ensued, but in time the curtain was brought down on both cases.

While detailed evidence of the responsibility for the killing of the Rosselli brothers was found in intelligence service papers, when it came to the regicide in Marseilles, the SIM offered no collaboration. What’s more, the Ministry of Internal Affairs managed to prevent the court from getting even a single deposition from Inspector Conti. For the Italian apparatus that survived Fascism, the Ustasha had never existed.

88 ASP, Acts of the so-called “Roatta trial,” Perugia’s Court of Appeals, folder 1, file 1086, *Sentenza dell’Alta Corte di Giustizia per le sanzioni contro il fascismo* (Sentence of the High Court of Justice for sanctions against fascism), 91 and 100.

89 On the “unbelievable overtones” of the acquittals, see De Lutiis, *Storia dei servizi segreti in Italia*, 29–37. See also Franzinelli, *Il delitto Rosselli*, 221–231.

From Turin to Zagreb

THE ITALIAN–YUGOSLAV DÉTENTE

On 7 January 1935, Laval and Mussolini signed the Rome Accords. On the matter of making peace with Yugoslavia, Mussolini did not wish to commit to any specific course of action: now that Pavelić was under custody and the Ustashes were being held in confinement on the island of Lipari, he felt it was Belgrade's turn to create a conducive climate for the easing of tensions, putting an end to anti-Italian irredentist propaganda. Laval insisted that Mussolini give Belgrade satisfaction, subjecting Pavelić and Kvaternik to trial. Mussolini replied that this depended on the evidence gathered on their alleged guilt, which France had yet to supply. Still, while the Duce was unwilling to make any formal concessions to Yugoslavia, "which his prestige did not allow," his attitude was slowly changing.¹ Propaganda radio broadcasts in Croatian were interrupted soon after the agreement with Laval was made. By signing the Rome Accords, Mussolini had undertaken to cooperate with France to secure balance in Europe. Thus, an aggressive foreign policy against Yugoslavia would have openly conflicted with his commitments. Furthermore, the war in Africa was about to be waged, and this would absorb all of Italy's—rather modest—military capacity. Mussolini needed not only a truce on the Yugoslav Front, but also for Yugoslavia to be allied with Italy against Germany, should the threat of the Anschluss worsen once again. Yugoslavia's new domestic situation also made a rapprochement advisable.

¹ De Felice, *Mussolini il duce*, I, 526.

A month after the regicide, Prince Paul had started meeting with “all the party leaders excluded from the regime, banned and boycotted by it, or—worse—tried, sentenced and interned.” According to a report by Ambassador Galli, Slovenian and Macedonian politicians, radical Serbs, and “an authoritative group of Croats led by Monsignor Bauer” were among the leaders summoned before the prince.² The most popular Croatian leader, Maček, was still being held in prison, but his condolences to the Queen Mother and to the government of Belgrade had been interpreted as ushering in a friendlier phase. One of the first actions carried out by Jevtić’s government resulted in Maček’s release on 22 December 1934. No sooner had he been set free than he telegraphed the regent to thank him: “I hope, and believe, this act is the first sign of your good will to achieve a fair reorganization of our state community, thereby satisfying the justified requests of the Croatian people.” The telegram was made public, and Maček immediately let Mussolini know that it had been “a tactical maneuver,” and that Croats “anxiously [awaited] the chance to settle the score with Serbia.”³ Nevertheless, these were the early signs of the rift that was developing between Maček and Pavelić. The *poglavnik* had succeeded in killing the tyrant, but failed at bringing about an insurrection. Now, Maček could run as the leader of all Croats, setting forth the reformist program he had always found more agreeable. Soon after this time, he clarified his position with a letter to the Croatian Emigration Committee in Vienna, which reached Mussolini as well: “I shall always, and on every occasion, ask for the impossible, so that we may attain as much as possible under the very grave circumstances we are in.” Indeed, “a free and independent Croatia [...] bound to Italy by economic ties” remained Maček’s ultimate goal. If in the meantime, as a “transitory measure,” he entered into “some agreements” with the government of Belgrade, he would do so only “to make progress along the winding road before us.”⁴

2 DDI, 7th series, vol. 16, doc. 128, 138.

3 DDI, 7th series, vol. 16, doc. 397, 413–14.

4 DDI, 7th series, vol. 16, doc. 519, 539–40.

Galli left the legation in Belgrade at the end of February 1935, replaced by Guido Viola, to whom Mussolini gave precise instructions: "Your mission in Yugoslavia is primarily to effect a *détente* in Italian–Yugoslav relations. A climate favorable to the establishment of a friendship and nonaggression pact must be created. You can assure [Yugoslav authorities] that we will no longer provide shelter to Croatian political exiles, beyond what is owed on account of a general principle of hospitality and a sense of humanity. As for the political exiles held in Lipari, we shall find a way to disband them, in part by absorbing them, and in part by providing them with means to emigrate elsewhere." Minister Viola was to keep watch on the relations between Belgrade and Berlin to "prevent an alliance between Germany and Yugoslavia," and "to prevent Yugoslavia's adherence to the Anschluss." And if Austria's annexation to Germany were completed, "fatally," then Yugoslavia would have to be "persuaded of the convenience of siding [with Italy] to face and thwart Germany's onward march." On 15 March, presenting his credentials before the Yugoslav court, Ambassador Viola said: "Italy's feelings toward Yugoslavia are nothing but friendly. Italy has no intention of upsetting Yugoslavia's development or its territorial integrity. Quite the contrary, Italy aims to develop all existing possibilities in order to reach cordial and concrete cooperation" with Yugoslavia.⁵ This was the first time, since the end of the Great War, that Italy ever formally committed to respecting the integrity of the Yugoslav state.

This openness on the part of Italy was very well received in Belgrade, and the regent Paul, who aimed at a broad coalition government supported by all nationalities, immediately started consulting with the leading members of the opposition—namely, the Slovenian Korošec, the Bosnian Muslim Spaho, and the Croatian Maček. The first two said they would cooperate, whereas Maček said his participation in the government was contingent on certain conditions: "reform of the electoral law, summoning of the constituent assembly, freedom of press

5 DDI, 7th series, vol. 16, doc. 660, 695–96, and doc. 716, Attachment I, 761.

and assembly, independence of administration, finance and national divisions of the army.”⁶ Paul could not, or would not, consent to such demands, and on 24 June placed the Council of Ministers, as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, into the hands of the radical Milan Stojadinović, who had already been the finance minister three times. The new leader formed a democratic coalition government, with Monsignor Korošec at the head of internal affairs and Mehmed Spaho at the head of communications. Meanwhile, he appeased the army by confirming General Živković at the head of the war department. Maček stayed in Zagreb, and was adamant about not resuming parliamentary activity until Belgrade agreed to allow autonomist reforms—the first step toward federalism.

In July, Stojadinović asserted his government’s full willingness to engage in sincere collaboration with the Kingdom of Italy. In September, he made it known that he was ready to meet with Suvich, in order to open negotiations and establish “direct” relations between the two countries, independent “of bonds and connections with the Little Entente and with the Balkan Entente, and, if necessary, even out from under the aegis of France.” The Yugoslav government, Ambassador Viola wrote, hoped to reach “not only a direct, general, and long-lasting agreement with our country, but also, in a not-too-distant future, a military alliance.” Yet Stojadinović could not “go to Italy for a meeting, though he wished to very much,” if “the position of the main agitators” was not addressed and handled first. Without a conviction of the rebels, even if just “a symbolic one,” Stojadinović would have risked “seriously” compromising his own government and politics. For an “official rapprochement” between the two countries to take place, this “obstacle” had to be removed.⁷

Early in October 1935, the Italian troops attacked Ethiopia; the League of Nations condemned Italy’s aggression, and imposed eco-

6 DDI, 8th series, vol. 1, doc. 454, 478.

7 DDI, 8th series, vol. 2, doc. 69, 60, and doc. 152, 140–41.

nomic sanctions. Austria, Hungary, and Albania were the only nations to dispute these measures. Yugoslavia aligned itself with the League of Nations, but Stojadinović quickly reassured Mussolini: "Under no circumstance will Yugoslavia's position as expressed in Geneva have any practical effect on Italy, which will always be able to count on receiving supplies of raw fuel and food from Yugoslavia." Mussolini appreciated the gesture, and replied that, by keeping commercial channels open with Italy "even in a time of sanctions," Yugoslavia would offer "proof of its friendship." This in turn might pave the way to a "general agreement" between Rome and Belgrade, and perhaps even lead to a change in Italian politics in the Danubian area. As for Stojadinović's concerns, it was best to wait for the trial in Aix-en-Provence to be "solved," after which time the head of the Italian government "would permanently deal with Croatian emigration."⁸

THE SPIDER'S WEB

In the fall of 1935, a young journalist from Turin—sent to Le Nuove prison in Turin to cover a ceremony that was to take place there—managed to interview Pavelić. The treatment reserved to the latter was what the journalist first noted with some surprise: "They had knocked down walls and merged three cells into a small apartment equipped with a bathroom." Pavelić had been reading Dante and Gozzano, and, after speaking about poetry for a while, when asked about the regicide in Marseilles, had answered thus: "Like any Croat, in my heart, I killed him more than once." Deodato Foà thought he had just secured the first scoop of his career, but the article was discarded, for his editor wanted to avoid troubles with the censorship authorities.⁹

During his detention, Pavelić had always kept in touch with the outside world, thanks to the frequent visits by his wife and Inspec-

8 DDI, 8th series, vol. 2, doc. 311, 290, and doc. 679, 650.

9 Foà, "Intervista a Pavelić a Montevideo."

tor Conti. In addition to providing for the Ustasha contingent in Lipari and for Servatzy's party, Ercole Conti supplied Pavelić's wife with a handsome monthly salary, which was used to support Kvaternik and Budak's family in Turin, as well as the Godinas in Trieste (including their son's tuition for the Jesuit institution in Brescia). Mara Pavelić dispatched messages and instructions on behalf of the *poglavnik* to all of his lieutenants and reported back to him with their answers. She was also in touch with Father Tacchi Venturi, an illustrious historian of the Society of Jesus who served as an intermediary between the Holy See and Mussolini, and advised the latter on religious questions.¹⁰ During his detention, Pavelić wrote *The Beautiful Blonde*, a romanticized novel about the regicide in Marseilles, centered on the mysterious bearer of arms, presented as a heroine of the Ustasha revolution. Printed in the United States and in South America, the novel was very successful among Croats abroad, and circulated clandestinely back at home.¹¹

Responsibility for the interned in Lipari had been entrusted to Mile Budak, who had already been Pavelić's trusted agent in Germany. At first, the 500 or so members of the Nucleus were accommodated in the Castle of Lipari, and—except for the fact that they could not leave the island—enjoyed full assistance and freedom of movement. Their morale was high, discipline reigned, and they all believed the contingent would depart for Croatia at any minute to take part in the final military action against the regime. After a few months of inaction, however, and as echoes of the Rome Accords between Mussolini and Laval reached Lipari, the men started showing signs of despondency and restlessness. On his visits to Lipari, Inspector Conti told the men to “keep calm, and be hopeful.” Once, he brought a message from Pavelić, which was read before all the men gathered in plenary assembly, and this had “a great effect on their spirits.” Branimir Jelić—who was in Lipari like everyone else, and aspired to manage the contingent—took it

¹⁰ DDI, 7th series, vol. 16, doc. 226, 235.

¹¹ Pavelić, *Lijepa plavojka*.

upon himself to aggravate the unrest. On the strength of the prestige he enjoyed in the colonies overseas and in Germany, Jelić assembled a group of thirty or so dissidents, and started criticizing Italian authorities and Pavelić's revolutionary strategy. Budak sought help from Conti, who, after discussing the matter with Pavelić, took three measures. First, he transferred Jelić to a clinic in Messina, and later to a private hospital in Bologna, where the Croat spent a long time under strict surveillance. Second, he removed the thirty-four dissidents from the Nucleus, accommodating them in the suburb of Canneto. And third, he sent Mile Budak to Turin, so he could receive instructions from the *poglavnik*. Back in Lipari, Budak gathered the contingent in the castle's enclosure, and, "before the cheering men," read a new message by Pavelić, who once again insisted "that they keep calm until their work could be resumed."¹²

Dissent also broke out among Servatzy's group, placed in hiding amid the mountains of the Sila by Conti. In January 1935, the Carabinieri of Longobucco reported growing hostilities between Perčec and Servatzy, who by this time were living in separate hotels: Mr. and Mrs. Servatzys, a Hungarian captain, and four other Ustashas were lodged in one hotel, while Perčec, his former assistant—the sexton—and the latter's partner resided in another. Conti wrote the following words to Bocchini: "It is clear that Servatzy and those loyal to him continue to resent the three, particularly the former, both because he manifests his aversion to Pavelić with no discretion and because of his previous behavior, which wreaked more than a little havoc on the organization."¹³ A month later, their three bodies, riddled by gunshots, were found in a wooded area nearby. Servatzy and his entourage recounted that Perčec and the woman had started having an affair, and that the sexton had killed them both, finally taking his own life. But the Carabinieri had no doubt as to who had committed the crime, and handed them over to

¹² Iuso, *Il fascismo e gli Ustascia (1929-1941)*, 85 and 88.

¹³ ACS, DGPS/AEC, b. 7/40-1-3, 6 February 1935, 5.

justice. Conti dashed to Calabria and convinced the Carabinieri to endorse the idea that the tragedy had been the result of a love affair gone awry; in turn, the magistrate also endorsed this hypothesis, and closed the case. The seven Ustashas were then transferred to Cerchiara Calabra, where they were able to find peace. Having endured a harsh winter, Mr. and Mrs. Servatzy were further authorized to take the waters in the nearby spa town of Guardia Piemontese.

In May, Mile Budak returned to Turin to assist his wife after she had undergone surgery, and met with Pavelić several times at Le Nuove. Meanwhile, discontent grew in Lipari. When sixty-five men were killed in a typhus epidemic that August, those who survived were left further disheartened and prepared to dissent.¹⁴ To isolate the agitators, twenty-four men “averse to Budak and responsible for acts of indiscipline” were transferred to Stromboli.¹⁵ To help ease tensions, Budak proposed to Conti that a delegation of dissidents be taken to Turin. Three representatives of the different classes of men—an intellectual, an officer, and a fighter—were chosen to speak with Pavelić in prison, during a meeting presided over by Conti on 13 October 1935. After reading close to a hundred letters presented to him by the delegates from Lipari, the *poglavnik* reassured them at length. He told them the Ustasha had to be grateful to Italy for all that it had done and continued to do for them. As “a great power,” Italy played a central role on the international stage, and for the sake of international balance it presently had to grow closer to Yugoslavia. This would not change the “fateful course of events,” however, for Mussolini would never “harm the Croatian people.” The Ustasha must remain prepared, for “in three months at the latest we will resume our action.” Pavelić used a map to illustrate the Ustasha’s task to the delegates. Serbs, the *poglavnik* said, might be willing to grant Croats the western part of Bosnia, inhabited predominantly by Catholic Croats, but they would insist on keep-

¹⁴ Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret*, 424.

¹⁵ ACS, DGPS/AEC, b. 7/40-1-5, 8 July 1936, 4.

ing control over Bosnia's eastern regions, inhabited mainly by Orthodox Serbs. The Ustasha, however, would seize eastern regions as well, reaching the historical borders of the Drina and Bosna. That territory must be conquered and "purified by steel and fire from the Vlachs, now self-styled as Serbs, whom Turkish landowners brought along with them as farmers." Pavelić claimed he had already figured "how many such Vlachs will have to flee to make room for the 100,000 Croats that are presently languishing in America." And finally Croatia, thus revived, would have a capital worthy of its thousand-year history. Pointing on a town in the heart of Bosnia on his map, the *poglavnik* concluded: "Here, you see, lies Jajce, the ancient capital of the Croatian Kingdom. Zagreb is too peripheral, and too polluted by Jews and false, opportunistic intellectuals."¹⁶ The delegates returned to Lipari filled with gratitude for their leader, and with a clear understanding of the mission that awaited them.

PAVELIĆ'S CONDITIONAL RELEASE

Early in February 1936, as the trial in France was reopened, Pavelić wrote a memorial titled "Dalla prigionia di Torino al Procuratore della Repubblica presso la Corte di Appello di Aix-en-Provence" (From the prison in Turin, to the attorney general of the Republic in the Court of Appeals of Aix-en-Provence). The text circulated clandestinely in Croatia. To respond to the accusations of terrorism and of having organized the crime from Italy flung at him from all sides, Pavelić tried to uphold the theory that the Ustasha movement was deeply rooted in his country, stretching the truth considerably in the process. His memorial claimed the organization was born in Zagreb on 7 January 1929, in the wake of the proclamation of King Alexander's dictatorship. In fact, as we have seen, it was born in Italy between 1930 and 1932. By this back-dating, the *poglavnik* could claim the revolutionary organization "was

¹⁶ Iuso, *Il fascismo e gli Ustascia (1929-1941)*, 90.

not born abroad, it was not created on the initiative of a foreign country, Hungary or Italy, but in Croatia by Croats to safeguard their own political and human rights.” The Ustasha organization, Pavelić wrote, was a “revolutionary movement” with “hundreds of thousands of active members, who are prepared to fight [...] to reestablish the Independent State of Croatia.” No one could “claim the right to call such a revolutionary movement a terrorist organization.” The truth was quite different. The active members of the Ustasha organization abroad were about a thousand, whereas back home they were but a few hundred. They had never managed to mobilize masses, and they had always exclusively carried out terrorist acts.¹⁷

The trial in Aix-en-Provence ended on 12 February 1936. For months, Italian authorities had assured Budak that Ante Pavelić would not be held in prison “a single day after the end of the trial,” yet his release was now being postponed from week to week, and both Pavelić and Budak started protesting vigorously.¹⁸ Mussolini had more pressing matters to deal with, on the Ethiopian Front as well as in Italy, where the international sanctions imposed by the League of Nations were beginning to take their toll. Also, Stojadinović expected Pavelić to be sentenced at least to a symbolic punishment, and would have reacted badly if he’d been set free. On 25 March, Pavelić and Kvaternik went on a hunger strike, and a solution had to be found: the former was hospitalized in a clinic in Moncalieri, while the latter was transferred to Lipari.

Before the news reached Belgrade by other means, Fulvio Suvich summoned the Yugoslav ambassador in Rome, Dučić, and explained to him how the decision to release Pavelić had been made. The Italian authorities had waited a long time after the sentence was issued in Aix-en-Provence, and, “because the Italian government received no communication on the matter, there no longer was any justification to

¹⁷ AMAE, Série Contrôle des étrangers, Supplément, vol. 131, 82–89.

¹⁸ ACS, DGPS/AEC, b. 3, 4 November 1935.

extend his detention." Still, every possible measure had been taken to ensure that the two "Croatian political exiles" could not "carry out any activity that might harm relations between our two countries." As soon as he was ready to leave the hospital, Pavelić would be "interned together with his family in an isolated place, where they would be kept under strict surveillance," and Kvaternik would not be allowed to leave Lipari. Dučić replied that he would immediately inform his government, but that he felt certain the Italian decision would make "a very poor impression."¹⁹ And indeed it did. Nevertheless, within a few weeks, Ambassador Viola succeeded in convincing Stojadinović that Pavelić and his Ustasha would no longer have the opportunity to harm Yugoslavia. Stojadinović answered that if Mussolini offered a much-awaited symbolic gesture, as far as he was concerned, the matter of Croatian political opposition in Italy could finally be considered "dead and buried."²⁰ Mussolini made no such gesture.

Pavelić remained in the clinic in Moncalieri for two months. Budak continued to be in charge of the contingent, but with one stipulation. He had been criticized, among other reasons, for his shady management of the finances of Lipari. Pavelić thus appointed Kvaternik as administrator. The *poglavnik* also wanted to meet with Branimir Jelić, still in isolation in the same private hospital in Bologna. For some time, Jelić had been asking for a passport, because he wanted to move back to Germany to live with his lover, or so he said. Inspector Conti, who organized Jelić's transfer to Moncalieri, believed he wanted to turn his back on Pavelić and seize control of the organization. Instead, much to his surprise, "all misunderstandings and differences of opinion" between them were solved in two hours. Pavelić charged Jelić with the tasks of resuming relations with Mladen Lorković, his trusted man in Berlin, and reestablishing links with Croatia from his new base in Germany. Conti accompanied Jelić to Venice, gave him a pass-

¹⁹ DDI, 8th series, vol. 3, doc. 567, 627.

²⁰ DDI, 8th series, vol. 4, doc. 52, 58.

port, and put him on an airplane to Munich, “supplied with everything he would require to face his early needs, and even with limited funds in foreign currency.”²¹

Pavelić was released from the clinic in June, when he and Inspector Conti left for Salerno. Having found a comfortable villa in Cava de’ Tirreni, Conti rented it for Pavelić, whom he introduced to the owner of the house as a rich man back from America. Shortly after that time, Pavelić’s wife, their two young children, and their housekeeper Angelina Fedeli, who had been with the family since Brescia, reached him in Cava de’ Tirreni. Their eldest daughter, Višnja, was studying in a private school in Switzerland. The Budak family likewise left Turin, settling in Messina, a two-hour ferry ride from Lipari. The tireless Inspector Conti also handled the matter of Servatzky and his entourage, who, by frequently moving from one hotel to another in Calabria, were starting to draw attention. Vjekoslav would have gladly returned to Hungary to deal with the forty or so Ustasha that still lived there with their families, and to manage a mine he owned. But his past was too compromising, and he was persuaded to stay. Thus, the seven of them—who still enjoyed a privileged status as “special refugees,” and received an adequate stipend—went to Lucca, where Conti had rented one apartment for the married couple and another for the soldiers, presenting them as Spanish refugees.

In June 1936, Mussolini entrusted the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to his son-in-law Galeazzo Ciano, and, early in July, Count Luigi Vidau replaced Mazzolini at the helm of the Croatia Office. Pavelić wanted to pay his men in Lipari a visit to cheer them up, but was persuaded not to: it would have been ill-advised to expose the Italian government to new protests in Belgrade. However, Inspector Conti was authorized to accompany him to Messina, where a meeting took place with Budak and several men from Lipari, which served to restore calm and a feeling of hope in the whole contingent. From Cava de’ Tirreni, Pavelić

²¹ ACS, DGPS/AEC, b. 7, 25 April 1936.

resumed intense correspondence with his men abroad; in order not to reveal his true address, he used a post office box he rented in Naples in the name of Bauer Estevans, a new alias the Italian police gave him.

PAVELIĆ AGAINST MAČEK

Pavelić's and Kvaternik's release, and the fact that Mussolini failed to offer a conciliatory gesture, did nothing to help relations between Italy and Yugoslavia. To make matters worse, in May 1936, during the proclamation of the empire, Mussolini stated that victory in Africa had been but the first step on Italy's Imperial Roman road. Belgrade began seriously to fear for the future of Dalmatia, while Paris and London fanned the flames in an attempt to lure Stojadinović to their side. The Yugoslav leader exploited the circumstances to negotiate a large loan from Great Britain, but was increasingly drawn to Hitler's offers of friendship and collaboration. Indeed, German economic penetration in Yugoslavia, set off under King Alexander, had been intensifying as industrial investments and supplies—headed by the colossal industrial company belonging to the Krupp family—increased in the region, mirrored by increased agricultural exports to Germany from Yugoslavia. According to a trusted source close to Mussolini, Hitler had approached the regent with a proposed long-term pact, whereby Yugoslavia was to avoid taking an interest in the matter of Austria and the Anschluss, and refuse to recognize the USSR "at least for four more years." In exchange, Germany would "guarantee" current Yugoslav borders against Italy, Austria, and Hungary; provide Yugoslavia with modern armaments in exchange for raw materials and agricultural products; and favor "the development of Yugoslav influence in the Balkans and a rapprochement between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia."²² All the ingredients were present for an ambitious plan—an alliance between the Great Reich and the Great Yugoslavia, the most serious threat to Italian expansionism.

²² DDI, 8th series, vol. 4, doc. 293, 340–41.

From Zagreb, Consul Umiltà wrote that the British, the French, and the Serbs were always working to discredit Italy, exploiting “to the fullest extent possible Croats’ fear of losing Dalmatia, [which they said would be] swallowed by the Italian empire.”²³ Monsignor Stepinac, recently nominated coadjutor to the elderly Archbishop Bauer, had promoted two meetings in the archbishop’s palace between Maček and the diplomatic representatives of France and Great Britain, who wanted to convince him to make peace with Belgrade. The leader of the Croatian Peasant Party continued to voice his gratitude and admiration for Mussolini, but lamented Italy’s loss of interest in Croatia’s destiny, and expressed his concern for the future of Dalmatia. At the end of July, a meeting took place between Mussolini and August Košutić, Maček’s proxy in the Croatian opposition committee in Vienna. Mussolini denied the rumors regarding Italy’s aims on Dalmatia, reiterated his commitment to the Croatian people, and urged Košutić to meet with Pavelić to develop a common plan of action. Košutić declined this invitation, however, claiming that Maček and Pavelić were no longer in touch and were following different paths, “though they might reunite when the time comes for the final battle.” When this attempt failed, Mussolini sought the mediation of Ante Trumbić, the former foreign affairs minister of Yugoslavia who had fought with Pavelić and Maček, and now lived in exile. At the end of August 1936, Trumbić secretly met with Pavelić in Palermo. This time, it was the *poglavnik* who turned down the offer, pointing out that Maček had chosen to follow “the legal path” in pursuit of some illusory advantages, and maintained “good relations” with the Serbs of Croatia. Pavelić was intransigent when it came to the latter: “because the struggle for Croatian independence is waged markedly against Serbs, all of them without distinction must be viewed as untrustworthy and treated as such.”²⁴

²³ DDI, 8th series, vol. 4, doc. 371, 423–24.

²⁴ ACS, DGPS/AEC, b. 7, 7 July and 25 August 1936.

In mid-September, Count Vidau—the head of the Croatia Office—received Pavelić privately in Rome. Because he wanted to intensify his action, the *poglavnik* asked for increased financial aid, and for permission to meet with Mladen Lorković, his trusted man in Berlin, and with Andrija Artuković, who, after several ups and downs, was reorganizing the network in Hungary.²⁵ “With great tact,” Count Vidau reminded him of “the delicate international situation,” which warranted avoiding “too conspicuous an action.” In any event, Pavelić did get “some of the financial aid” he’d hoped for, and was authorized to meet his two lieutenants in Florence, “in the most reserved way possible,” and in the presence of Inspector Conti. Pavelić further observed that the climate of Cava de’ Tirreni did not suit him, his children needed a good private school, and he would gladly move with his family to Florence, where he was “entirely unknown.” Vidau stalled.²⁶

Lorković and Artuković entered into Italy by way of Chiasso using counterfeit Yugoslav passports, and spent two days with Pavelić—in Conti’s presence—during a minisummit of sorts, devoted to the assessment of the overall situation.²⁷ The Ustasha network had resumed work in Germany, where local authorities did not hinder its activities, while demanding the utmost discretion. The forty Ustashas who had stayed in Hungary after the murders in Marseilles were “dispatched separately to several towns,” where the police doled out modest monthly payments to help them. Pro-Maček members of émigré communities in America hotly contested Pavelić. To “rekindle faith” in the *poglavnik*, it was decided to “send Artuković there, for he was held in high esteem by everyone for the hardships [he had] endured for the Croatian cause.” As for Croatia, the two lieutenants could not have painted a rosier picture: “The masses follow Pavelić, and prefer him over Maček, whom

25 Arrested in France after the attempt in Marseilles, Artuković was handed over to Yugoslav justice. He was tried for complicity in regicide, but the evidence against him was weak. After eighteen months in jail, he was released by an act of clemency.

26 ACS, DGPS/AEC, b. 7/40-1-6, 29 September 1936, 1-4.

27 Conti always recorded the conversations in Croatian, and then had them transcribed by a translator.

they accuse of inertia, while feeling admiration and devotion for Pavelić [...] Croats look at Italy with gratitude, and are enthusiastic about the work being done by the Duce, whose help they expect to receive to free their country.”²⁸ It read like a script for the benefit of Inspector Conti.

Artuković also gave a detailed report on the communist movement: during his eighteen months in jail, he had established contacts with communist prisoners, from whom he had found out that the Communist Party was waiting for “the right time to take strong revolutionary action.” According to Artuković, communists, directed by emissaries of Moscow, were intensifying their activity in universities and middle schools, in industrial areas, and wherever “military plants, arsenals, and weapon manufacturers” were present; the communist press was very widespread, both in Belgrade and in Zagreb, and propaganda among soldiers and army officers was “most active”; Jews were “linked” with the communist movement, too, and tried to favor it by every means. In Croatia, communists feared no one, except for the Ustasha, whom they called fascists. The “Croatian national revolutionary organization” had been set up to foil the Ustasha. According to Artuković, Serbian communists were waiting for “a Croatian uprising to launch their own revolutionary action, through which they aimed to seize power.”²⁹

As in his depiction of Pavelić’s popularity back home, here too Artuković was overdoing it. Serbian and Croatian students really had ended up in jail for participating in communist demonstrations. And despite being outlawed in 1921, a clandestine Yugoslav Communist Party loyal to Moscow and very active really did exist. But the conditions were most certainly not there for a coup. Simply put, the “red scare” was becoming a catchphrase of fascist and Nazi propaganda in those months, and Pavelić immediately exploited it for his own purposes. Soon enough, he’d told his two lieutenants, “a war will have to be waged in Croatia too between the Ustasha, viewed as fascists, and

²⁸ ACS, DGPS/AEC, b. 7/40-1-6, 29 September 1936, 1-4.

²⁹ Ibid., 30 September 1936, 1-3.

Maček's followers, whose democratic leanings are polluted by communism."³⁰ Slave to a sectarian logic, and obsessed by the thought that Maček might prevail back in their homeland, the *poglavnik* looked to the Spanish Civil War, which had just broken out, and rode the wave of anti-Bolshevism.

THE TREATY OF FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN ITALY AND YUGOSLAVIA

On 26 September 1936, Rome and Belgrade subscribed to a commercial agreement. This set the situation back in motion. Stojadinović placed great emphasis on the "extraordinary importance" of the agreement for the Yugoslav economy, as well as for the "normalization of relations between the two countries after the difficult period of sanctions."³¹ A month later, Ciano met with Hitler in Berchtesgaden. The Führer wanted to counteract the agreement between democracies, which had "a sort of cement and leaven in Bolshevism," with a coalition led by Germany and Italy. "Many countries that would side against us for fear of pan-Germanism and Italian imperialism," Hitler said, "will be inclined to be a part of our constellation, if they view the Italian-German union as a barrier against the Bolshevik threat, domestically and internationally." After all, Italians and Germans had "already jointly dug the first trench" against Bolshevism in Spain. Yugoslavia was among the countries that needed to be drawn into the Italian-German orbit. Yugoslavia was still "on good terms" with Germany, and Hitler hoped it would soon establish a "firm understanding" with Italy as well. During the speech he gave in Milan on 1 November, Mussolini said relations between Italy and Yugoslavia had "greatly improved," adding: "Today, the necessary and sufficient moral, political, and economic conditions exist to lay new foundations for a concrete friendship between these two countries."³²

³⁰ Ibid., 11 October 1936, 2-3.

³¹ DDI, 8th series, vol. 5, doc. 377, 425n.

³² DDI, 8th series, vol. 5, doc. 277, 316-19, and doc. 329, 375n.

In this climate, every time he met with Pavelić, Inspector Conti found him to be increasingly “discouraged and irritated.” The *po-glavnik* had come across an apartment in Florence, in Via Puccinotti, suited to the needs of his family, and insisted on moving there as soon as possible. Count Vidau had authorized the family’s transfer, so as to allow the two kids to go back to school, but had asked Pavelić to stay in Cava de’ Tirreni a while longer, and to seek without haste an apartment in a town more secluded than Florence. But Pavelić stopped the delay and went to Florence. He told Conti he needed medical attention, and that before looking for a new residence he wished to speak with Vidau directly. “He made me understand that he intends to examine his situation thoroughly, and that he would even be willing to leave Italy, should his presence here be a hindrance,” Conti wrote. Pavelić was allowed to stay with his family in Florence, “also on account of his suffering from rheumatic fever,” but Conti started keeping a tighter rein on him. The inspector feared that Pavelić, “presently disoriented,” might take independent initiatives, which might prove rash. Florence’s central police was asked to maintain “uninterrupted surveillance” on Tonetti (Pavelić’s new alias), who was to be “followed at all times” and whose incoming correspondence was to be subjected to “revision.” As for his outgoing mail, Conti made a list of the people Pavelić could write to, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs arranged for control in mail-sorting centers.³³

In November, Prince Paul probed into Maček’s intentions. Rumors were circulating to the effect that a “compromise with the Serbs” might be underway. Consul Umiltà immediately got to work to find out whether they were true. The Croatian leader denied them, calling them “fantasies devoid of any foundation.” Maček had merely taken a step toward Belgrade by recognizing “the borders and the dynasty,” that is to say, Yugoslav unity. But he had reiterated his objectives with the regent: the suppression of King Alexander’s constitution, free elec-

33 ACS, DGPS/AEC, b. 7/40-1-6, 25 October 1936, 1.

tions, and the setting up of a constituent assembly that might ensure “our independence on our own soil.” An agreement, however, was still a long way ahead, and Maček was determined to let Mussolini know that the Croatian Peasant Party continued to be a friend of Italian politics. As for Pavelić, Maček wrote: “In my view, Doctor Pavelić no longer actually represents Croatian opposition abroad, and I have no relations with him.”³⁴

In December, Ciano and the Yugoslav ambassador Dučić set up two commissions, one for political matters and one for economic matters. Negotiations opened in January 1937. Clearly, from Yugoslavia’s standpoint, the first problem in need of a solution was the issue of Pavelić and of his 550 Ustasha. The Italians continued to elude it, and the Yugoslavs to raise it, until finally, during a meeting held in Palazzo Chigi on 16 January 1937, Ciano answered thus: “We shall send some of them away from our territory—we’ll dispatch them to Africa, or otherwise provide them with opportunities far away from Europe. Others we shall hold in the country and keep under the strictest police surveillance. In brief, we will prevent them from carrying out any kind of action whatsoever. I repeat, you have nothing to worry about.”³⁵

On 26 February, Stojadinović’s lively protestations were heard in Rome. Pavelić had “left Italy to have suspicious conferences abroad,” or so Stojadinović claimed he’d been told. Ciano quickly replied that such news was baseless, and that Pavelić, who remained still “under strict surveillance, was harmless.”³⁶ There is no indication that Pavelić had been able to exit the country, but he was certainly hard at work, for precisely in those days his network had been dealt a harsh blow in Berlin. At Stojadinović’s urging, the German police had stopped Artuković from setting off for America and arrested him, together with Lorković and Jelić, thereby effectively crushing the Berlin center. Files from the archive seized in Lorković’s residence revealed that close contact had

34 DDI, 8th series, vol. 5, doc. 458, 513–14.

35 In Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i ustaše*, 272.

36 DDI, 8th series, vol. 6, doc. 203, 262–63.

been kept with the Milan branch of the Ustasha headquarters, and as a result that the latter continued to be active.³⁷

On 25 March 1937, in Belgrade, Ciano and Stojadinović signed the Italian–Yugoslav Friendship Treaty. The latter consolidated peace between the two countries and ushered in “a new era in political and economic relations between the two states.” Key points of the treaty were respect for land and sea borders in the Adriatic, a mutual commitment to nonbelligerence, the broadening of commercial exchanges, and respect for Albania’s sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity. It was an important agreement, which put an end to almost twenty years of contention and could revive Italian expansionism in the Balkan–Danubian area. But by virtue of this agreement, Yugoslavia effectively entered into the Nazi–Fascist constellation. What was born was not so much an axis between Rome and Belgrade, as a three-way deal that included Berlin. Stojadinović would exploit this situation very well, whereas Mussolini’s expansionism would suffer as a result of Germany’s competition.

Article 4 of the treaty bound each party “not to tolerate on its territory, much less support, any activity aimed against the territorial integrity and the existing order of the other country.” Rome had to disband the Ustasha organization, and Belgrade would have to liquidate irredentist Slavs in its border regions. The measures Italy was to take were the object of a strictly secret verbal note. Pavelić and his fiduciaries were to be “interned”; all suspects were to be prevented from “any contact with others in their group and with people abroad”; a certain number of Ustasha could be used “as workers in Italian colonies.” Within three weeks the Italian police would provide the Yugoslav police with the names and interment locations of all the Ustasha present in Italy; a functionary of the Yugoslav police would work alongside Italian authorities to ascertain the operation’s successful outcome.³⁸

37 Lorković was also in touch with communities in America, whereas Perčević managed contacts with Croatia from his base in Vienna (Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i ustaše*, 246–48).

38 DDI, 8th series, vol. 6, doc. 340, 403 and 406.

THE DISBANDMENT OF THE NUCLEUS

Pavelić signed the act for the disbandment of the Croatian organization on 1 April 1937, during a meeting with Count Vidau, in Florence. While the *poglavnik* “appeared sorry,” he gave no sign, “at least no clear sign, of being overly worried.”³⁹ If something upset him, it wasn’t the formal act by which his military contingent was dissolved—the men had been unable to carry out any kind of work for some time—but rather the commitment he made with Vidau to relinquish “all political activity and communication with his trusted men abroad.”⁴⁰ On 5 April, Mile Budak read the *poglavnik*’s decree before the contingent in Lipari, whose men accepted it with composure. A month before, informed of the treaty’s clauses, Pavelić had prepared them for what was about to happen.⁴¹ One hundred and twenty of them—the men in charge of the contingent, noncommissioned officers, and intellectuals—were sent away; broken up into small groups, or individually, they were transferred to several provinces in southern Italy. Private soldiers, about 400 of them, stayed in Lipari, where they were given three options: they could return to their country of origin, stay in Italy (where they would continue to enjoy an allowance), or leave for other countries.

On 14 April, when the three weeks Italy was given to take the measures were up, Ciano informed Stojadinović of the situation: “Pavelić and Kvaternik are duly interned and in no position to carry out any kind of activity. The same is true of all the other men without distinction. About twenty of them ask that they be allowed into their homeland, and that there be no retaliation against them.” During their confinement in Lipari, the latter had asked the Ustasha command to be sent back to Croatia so they could join Maček. To persuade them to desist, the command had made recourse to all manner of pressure and violence, finally

39 ACS, DGPS/AEC, b. 3, 1 April 1937.

40 ACS, DGPS/AEC, b. 16, 20 April 1937.

41 Accompanied by Conti to Milazzo, Pavelić met with the men in charge of the Nucleus to make arrangements for the disbandment.

relocating them to Stromboli “for acts of insubordination.” Stojadinović enjoined Maček to “identify by name those who could reenter the country without measures being taken against them.”⁴²

On 18 April, the deputy prefect of the Serbian police, Sava Ćirković, arrived in Rome. Conti supplied him with a list of names and places for the Ustasha in Italy, and with photographs of the men.⁴³ Following orders from above, he omitted some of the names. A few days before the treaty between Italy and Yugoslavia was signed, Ante Godina had been transferred from Trieste to Grosseto, and Servatzky’s five collaborators had been moved to Isola del Giglio, while Vjekoslav and his wife had stayed in Lucca. Godina and Servatzky knew too much about Italy’s supply of weapons and funding, the camps, and the terrorist attack in Marseilles; it would have been unwise to reveal their presence in the country.

Ercole Conti and Sava Ćirković worked together for months, addressing one by one the cases of those who wanted to return to Croatia (a group comprising about sixty men at first), to reunite with family members in Belgium or Hungary, and so forth. In this early phase, Yugoslavia was hesitant to repatriate men it deemed untrustworthy. As a result, it gave no assurances as to the criminal procedures the former Ustasha might face. By the same token, Belgrade did not issue visas for those who wanted to leave for other countries. To use Ćirković’s words, “it is preferable that they remain under surveillance in a country we are in friendly relations with than be spread across Europe’s many states.”⁴⁴ None of the 400 men who stayed in Lipari wished to move to the colonies. Indeed, only with great difficulty did Conti manage to relocate about a hundred men to the work camps in Sardinia. The others were unwilling to move because they believed the friendship between Ita-

42 DDI, 8th series, vol. 6, doc. 458, 575–76.

43 According to Ćirković’s report to the Yugoslav Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ustashe spread throughout Italy were 510, thus classified: 377 peasants, 77 (factory) workers, 35 sailors, 12 merchants, 10 officers, 2 journalists, 6 professionals, 6 women, and 8 children (Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i ustaše*, 281).

44 Iuso, *Il fascismo e gli Ustascia (1929–1941)*, 120.

ly and Yugoslavia would end soon, and still hoped to resume the fight under the *poglavnik*'s leadership.

For his internment, Pavelić chose Siena. He arrived on 22 April 1937 accompanied by Conti, and temporarily settled into the Continental Hotel. His family would remain in Florence until the end of the school year. Conti urged the chief of police, Secreti, to keep a close watch on the guest and ensure his safety. Pavelić kept very much to himself, and the police only reported on a visit by Paolo Cortese, which took place on evening in May.⁴⁵ The former head of the Croatia Office had returned to Rome from Guatemala roughly a year before and had since started working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs again.

By the end of June, when his family joined him in Siena, Pavelić occupied Il Poggiarello, a villa in Via della Certosa that Conti had rented for them. It was a large residence surrounded by century-old trees. "Surveillance is thorough," Conti wrote, "for two agents are stationed permanently in proximity to his house, from where they can easily keep watch on his every activity and report on all his contacts with the outside world." During the summer, Conti observed that the *poglavnik* was "gradually resuming a certain political activity." His correspondence was "wholly insignificant," but the visits he was being paid by "friends from abroad, while brief," were becoming more frequent. The widow of Colonel Duić, Sarkotić's right-hand man in Vienna, visited several times, always in the presence of her son Stjepan, supposedly engaged to Pavelić's eldest daughter, Višnja. An unidentified elderly Croat also spent time at Il Poggiarello, together with his wife and son. "Pavelić has clearly established some kind of network," Conti wrote, "and avails himself of the people that visit him, who deliver the letters of his trusted men in Zagreb, Berlin, and Vienna, and are then charged with delivering his own letters and instructions, which he writes for them in haste."⁴⁶

⁴⁵ ACS, DGPS/AEC, b. 8/40-I-10, 22 May 1937.

⁴⁶ ACS, DGPS/AEC, b. 9/40-I-11, 22 September 1937.

THE UNFULFILLED CONCORDAT

The summer of 1937 was one of the most critical times in Milan Stojadinović's long government. In July 1935, soon after being elected prime minister and head of foreign affairs, the Yugoslav leader had signed a concordat with the Holy See. Wanting to honor the work started by King Alexander, Prince Paul had promoted the initiative, which he thought of "as a sacred duty." Cardinal Pacelli, the secretary of state, had welcomed the agreement as "a work of peace, born from the wisdom of a great pope and the insight of a prince endowed with enlightened intelligence and strong willpower."⁴⁷ Two years later, the concordat, which was tenaciously opposed by the Orthodox Church, had yet to be ratified by Belgrade's parliament and senate. Before taking on this challenge, Stojadinović had tried to consolidate his power. Now that an agreement had been reached with Italy ensuring good international balance, Stojadinović wished to see the concordat with the Vatican through as well. The latter could be the decisive step toward regaining the trust of Croats and Slovenes, who for the most part were Catholic. The text was put up for debate in the Skupština on 19 July 1937, and produced "an uproar from the allied opposition parties," which tried to overthrow the government.⁴⁸ An upsurge of protest demonstrations took Serbia by storm. The police had to watch over university buildings in Belgrade to avoid student riots. The most serious incident occurred during a procession led by the Orthodox clergy, when the police used its weapons to break up the demonstration, and ended up killing a bishop and a priest. The bells of the cathedral in Belgrade knelled, and a black flag was run up on the façade. Stojadinović's majority withstood the blow, and the text was approved on 23 July, with 166 votes for and 128 against.⁴⁹ A few hours later, the old patriarch Varnava's death by heart attack plunged the Orthodox commu-

47 *La Civiltà Cattolica* III (1935): 445–446, *Cronaca/Jugoslavia*.

48 DDI, 8th series, vol. 7, doc. 105, 129.

49 *La Civiltà Cattolica* III (1937): 374, *Cronaca/Jugoslavia*.

nity into the deepest grief. The clergy denied participation in the funeral to state authorities, and other riots and deaths ensued. The Holy Synod issued a resolution whereby nine members of the government, including Stojadinović, and roughly a hundred members of the parliament, who had voted in favor of the concordat, were referred to the ecclesiastical courts, and expelled from the community of the faithful. Stojadinović postponed the debate in the senate until late fall, hoping the unrest would be pacified by then. It was not so. In the Serbian countryside, Orthodox propaganda spread the rumor that the patriarch had been killed by “Borgia’s poison,” brought to Belgrade by Ciano on the occasion of the signing of the Friendship Treaty. Peasants were told that the concordat would force them “to convert to Catholicism, to Latinize their names and saints, and, more importantly, to give some of their lands back to the Church of Rome.”⁵⁰ In several provinces, serious incidents led to a great many victims, when thousands of peasants “armed with axes and rifles” prevented government representatives from explaining the reasons for the ratification.⁵¹ Finally, Stojadinović had to set the debate in the senate aside *sine die*, and the concordat remained a dead letter.

It was a harsh blow for the Holy See. The Church of Rome remained in a state of inferiority to the other religions of the kingdom, and, in the absence of the concordat, would have less strength in its opposition to the communist offensive in the Balkans. Since the summer of 1936, when the Spanish war broke out, the pope had intensified his appeals against communism, “the first and greatest and most universal danger of the world today.” The other threat, according to the authoritative *La Civiltà Cattolica*, came from Nazi paganism, which also aimed to destroy the Christian civilization. Yet, of these two dangers, the most serious was the one posed by communists, who were already invading France and Spain. Thus, “civilized nations” were called upon

⁵⁰ DDI, 8th series, vol. 7, doc. 142, 176, and doc. 198, 242.

⁵¹ *La Civiltà Cattolica* III (1937): 567, *Cronaca/Jugoslavia*.

to form “an anti-Soviet cordon sanitaire” from the Baltic to Greece for the safety of Europe.⁵²

Both in Croatia and in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the failed ratification of the concordat strengthened the radical Catholic wing, though in different proportions in the two territories, on account of the different political leanings of the high representatives of the Catholic Church in Zagreb and in Sarajevo. Monsignor Bauer, the elderly primate of Croatia, was unwell, and the coadjutor archbishop, Alojzije Stepinac, acted in his stead. When the emigration committee against King Alexander’s dictatorship was formed, Archbishop Bauer secretly grew closer to separatists, while continuing to fight for the freedom of the entire Catholic community within Yugoslavia, a state of which he very much felt to be a citizen. Bauer’s coadjutor and successor, Stepinac, was also a staunch Yugoslavist.⁵³ Yet Croatia also harbored a strong radical Catholic current in favor of Pavelić’s separatism, whose champions could be found within the university, the Križari, and a part of the clergy.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Catholic community’s spiritual guide was Archbishop Ivan Šarić, at the helm of the metropolitan archdiocese of Sarajevo since 1922. An advocate of Ustashism and the return to “Sacred Croatia,” Šarić was the greatest exponent of Catholic radicalism in Yugoslavia. His aide, the reverend Krunoslav Draganović, had embraced the Ustasha cause since his youth. A scholar of ecclesiastical history, he had risen to prominence in certain circles with his learned research on the Catholic Croats of Bosnia-Herzegovina.⁵⁴ In 1932, he had moved to Rome, and worked in the Pontifical Oriental Institute, where he addressed the issues of the Eastern Church and of Islam. He had also carried out a number of missions abroad on behalf of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (Propaganda Fide). Once back in Sarajevo, Draganović had become secretary to the arch-

52 Ibid. III (1936): 67, *Il monito del Papa contro il comunismo* and III (1936): 266, *Il pericolo russo*.

53 During the Great War, Stepinac fought in the Yugoslav legion, ending up a prisoner of the Italian army. For this reason, he was held in high esteem in Belgrade, too.

54 Draganović, *Katolička crkva u Bosni i Hercegovini nekad i danas*.

bishop's chancellery, and the initiator of intense publishing and propaganda on the part of Catholic radicals. Šarić and Draganović's political and religious leanings were shared by most members of the clergy, Catholic associations, and Bosnian Franciscan friars, who continued to be the most resolute champions of the notion of a "Sacred Croatia."

THE SUPPORT NETWORK

In November 1937, the government of Belgrade eliminated the crime of "belonging to the Ustasha terrorist association." Thus, those confined in Italy who had not committed other prosecutable crimes were free to return to their homeland, as long as they committed "not to undertake any activity against the state"; under such conditions, they could even engage in "political action."⁵⁵ By this amnesty, Stojadinović wanted to offer Italy a token of good will. Nevertheless, he did not wish to let his guard down too much, and so placed the task of evaluating each application in the hands of Inspector Vladeta Milićević of the secret police, the greatest expert in Ustasha terrorism. Within a couple of months, thirty-four Ustashes returned to their own country.

In December, Stojadinović took part in two days of meetings with Mussolini. The two men agreed on the main matters of international politics and on the need to intensify collaboration—including military collaboration—between their countries. The success of these meetings in Rome crushed the Croatian political exiles' last hopes that a rift between Italy and Yugoslavia might allow for them to turn to action once again. The movement's leaders, Conti wrote, were "in a state of overt restlessness," and the private soldiers were "downright disoriented," for they could not "establish any kind of contact with Pavelić and be told what to do by him." Repatriation offers left most of them "fearful and perplexed." The men were concerned that such offers were "a trap" set up by the Serbian police. Still, many were "secretly" inclined to ap-

⁵⁵ ACS, DGPS/AEC, b. 9/40, 7 November 1937.

ply for readmittance. As to their intentions, Conti provided the following account: “Inspecting the men’s correspondence, I have noticed that those who are particularly close to the cause of Croatian independence and to Pavelić are now starting to think about being repatriated, not to abandon their activity, but to resume it in their homeland, favoring Pavelić against Maček, whom they see as a traitor of the Croatian cause.” Indeed, Ante Bubalo and Jure Francetić had already returned to Croatia from their confinement on Isola del Giglio with precisely this plan in mind, Inspector Conti pointed out.⁵⁶

In December, Conti intercepted a letter for Pavelić, sent from Vienna and addressed to his housekeeper, Angelina Fedeli. The letter spoke of certain printed texts to be circulated and of a Zdenka who would soon visit the *poglavnik*. This was proof that Pavelić wasn’t abiding by the agreed-upon terms, and Conti ordered the chief of police in Siena to send away from the city any foreigner who might arrive with the intention of going to Il Poggiarello. In January 1938, Conti found out that the housekeeper’s brother, who lived in Brescia, was in possession of an envelope “to be delivered to Doctor Pavelić with the greatest urgency and secrecy.” The police of Brescia immediately took action, and—upon searching Fedeli’s house—seized a parcel of suspect material. The latter contained a detailed report on the situation of the disbanded organization signed by Mijo Babić and Ljubomir Kremzir, two Ustashas confined in Stigliano, Basilicata. Babić was one of Pavelić’s trusted men, whom Belgrade’s Special Court had already sentenced to death in absentia for several murders and bombings in Zagreb. During the confinement in Lipari, he had killed twenty Ustashas suspected of treason. From Stigliano, Babić, with help from Kremzir and Vlado Singer, confined in Calabria, managed to resume contact with his fellow soldiers both in Italy and abroad. The envelope also contained the plan for an operation to be carried out in Croatia in the spring with the collaboration of the already repatriated Ante Bubalo. A certain number of Usta-

⁵⁶ Ibid., 17 December 1937, 1–3.

shas, led by Babić, were to escape from confinement and “access Yugoslavia in groups to kill Stojadinović and the regent Paul, execute other terrorist acts, and trigger the revolution in Croatia.”⁵⁷

Among the material seized, Conti found some letters from Singer to Babić, which informed him of a young priest who was working hard to “set up a communication network with friends in Croatia.” Singer did not write to Babić directly, but addressed his letters to a textile store in Stigliano. Conti started monitoring the store, and was thus able to identify seven other Ustashas, “noted for their violent criminal record,” who would presumably follow Babić to Yugoslavia and be involved in the subversive act. All of them were arrested and incarcerated for some months, together with Babić, Kremzir, and Singer.⁵⁸

As his investigations progressed, Conti ascertained that, while confined in Taurianova, Vlado Singer had bonded with the parish priest Domenico Meduri, who agreed “to hide Singer’s correspondence and forward his letters” after placing them in appropriate double envelopes “bearing the stamp of the Curia of Cittanova.” These parcels were invariably sent to the same address: P.T., Ministry of the Third Order Regular, SS. Cosmas and Damian, Via in Miranda 2, Rome. Singer had supplied this address to other Ustashas, urging them to use it for all their correspondence and never to send letters from the cities they were residing in, “but from locations where none of our people are present.” Conti discovered it was Father Bonaventura Zec—the minister general or legal representative of the Third Order Regular in the Franciscan convent dedicated to Cosmas and Damian, at the foot of the Palatine Hill—who regularly received this mail.⁵⁹ The young priest mentioned by Singer, identified as the Dalmatian Josip Šojat, then took care of sorting the mail among the Ustasha settled in Italy and abroad. Šojat taught in the Pontifical Croatian College of St. Jerome, the old Croatian institution for the schooling of aspiring priests, in Rome. Sifting

⁵⁷ ACS, DGPS/AEC, b. 1/10, 15 January 1938, 1–2.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 3–4.

⁵⁹ ACS, DGPS/AEC, b. 1/10, 21 January 1938, and 9 February 1938.

through Šojat's correspondence, light was shed on a close-knit network in support of the Ustasha, made up primarily of Franciscans in Croatia, Bosnia, Dalmatia, France, America and, most prominently, Italy, where the Ustasha were confined.

In January 1938, the prefecture of Fiume seized a parcel from Buenos Aires, "addressed to the priest of this city," and containing many manifestos in Serbo-Croatian "inciting Croats to rebel against the current Yugoslav government." The man in question was Monsignor Luigi Torcoletti, the parish priest of the cathedral of Fiume, who also received "numerous copies of the periodical *Hrvatski Domobran*, the official organ of the Croatian Separatist Party, published in Buenos Aires." Professor Miroslav Mikulicich, a surgeon who resided on Yugoslav soil, noted for his "strong Croatian separatist sentiments," picked up the material. Conti also intercepted a parcel destined to a parish priest in Bucovizza, which contained a declaration "drafted in Argentina by the leaders of the Ustasha organization that existed there." The document extolled Pavelić, and harshly criticized Maček's attempts to reach a compromise with Belgrade. It further enjoined the Croatian people "to keep the spirit of rebellion against Serbs alive [...] and to punish Maček and his men as traitors." Conti suspected that the appeal was the doing of Pavelić himself, who preferred "to hide the fact he authored the text to avoid exposing his political activity in Italy." Conti was increasingly sure Pavelić continued to "keep the movement alive," though he could not understand how.⁶⁰

The police guarded the entrance to Il Poggiarello day and night, and any time Pavelić or his housekeeper Angelina stepped beyond the residence's gate they were followed closely. Mara regularly went to Florence to visit their two daughters, who attended the prestigious College of Poggio Imperiale. A policeman tailed her and noted down her every move—whether she visited her daughters, went to the tailor's, or spent the afternoon at a movie theater with a lady friend, whose house Mara

60 ACS, DGPS/AEC, b. 9/40, 13 January 1938, and 3 and 5 February 1938.

sometimes spent the night at. Her friend's mail was also put under surveillance, but to no avail.

ERRORS AND HORRORS...

The red scare was very much a current issue, and in July 1938, under the pseudonym A. S. Mrzlovovski, Pavelić published the pamphlet *Errors and Horrors: Communism and Bolshevism in Russia and in the World*.⁶¹ The first part of the volume was devoted to communist theory and praxis in Soviet Russia. The second part was centered on worldwide propaganda. If Pavelić had referenced his sources for the pamphlet, his most frequent citations would have been from the hundreds of pages the magazine *La Civiltà Cattolica* devoted to Bolshevism in those years, and to the installments of the periodical *Lettres de Rome*, edited by Father Joseph Ledit S.J., which decried the antireligious activity perpetrated by the Comintern all over the world. Toward the end of the book, in prose dripping with sentimentality, Pavelić indicated the direction of salvation. Little stock could be placed in Great Britain, which deemed Bolshevism “less frightening than its nationalist European rivals,” let alone in France, which had turned into “the stage for the gruesome drama of Bolshevik infiltration.”⁶² The only hope lay in Fascism, “to which Providence has entrusted the burdensome task of saving humanity in the current period of acute crisis, for its own sake and for the sake of its values.” Fascism was not the complete opposite of democracy, “but rather its successor as the antithesis of communism, and thus of Bolshevism.” In the inevitable clash with Bolshevism, Mussolini was not alone. To pick itself up after the losses of Versailles, Germany too had endowed itself with a leader who, like the Duce, had come “from the nation’s womb.” “Nationalist and Nazi” Germany had set off “the huge struggle against the cunning Bolshevik

61 First printed in the former fighters’ typography, in Siena, the book had a second edition in Milan in 1941, under Ante Pavelić’s name, prefaced by Alessandro Pavolini.

62 Pavelić, *Errori e orrori*, 249 and 252.

monster, which had begun to spread its wings over the whole of Europe.” Therefore, Italy and Germany must unite in a “Holy Alliance.” This alone could overthrow communism in Russia, or at least “permanently bar its path.”⁶³

Publishing this book wasn’t all Pavelić was up to. Indeed, he had not abandoned action, but merely changed tactics. Unable to execute terrorist acts, because the collaboration between Yugoslavia, Italy, and Germany hindered him, he was trying to make up ground back at home. In January 1938, the already repatriated Ante Bubalo had written to Mile Budak—the former lieutenant in Lipari, later confined in Salerno—urging him to return to Zagreb and join forces with the majority of Frankists, setting up a new political party in “opposition to Belgrade and to Doctor Maček,” under Pavelić’s aegis. Inspector Conti had intercepted the letter, without confiscating it, and had not mentioned the matter with his Yugoslav colleague Milićević. In March, Budak asked to be repatriated with his family. As a writer, he enjoyed fame in Yugoslavia—some of his popular novels had been rather successful—and Milićević and Conti went to Salerno to pay him a visit. Budak said he no longer felt bound to Pavelić, so much so that he hadn’t even told him about his decision. He expressed gratitude toward Italy, and added that he “completely” approved of the collaboration between Stojadinović and Mussolini. Milićević informed the Yugoslav leader, who said he was in favor of letting Budak return to Zagreb: his work could prove very valuable “to reach a concrete agreement with the Croats.”⁶⁴

Belgrade did in fact intend to make peace with Zagreb as soon as possible. On 12 March 1938, German troops had invaded Austria, which had been annexed to the Reich. With Nazis on the Yugoslav border, and a nascent Berlin-funded pro-Nazi movement in Yugosla-

63 Ibid., 253–72. Pavelić had already addressed the issue of the war in 1937, in his essay titled “Situazione polica,” in which he predicted the outbreak of an international conflict in the near future (Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i ustaše*, 298).

64 ACS, DGPS/AEC, b. 9/40, 13 January 1938, Attachment 1, 2, and 14 May 1938, 1.

via, Stojadinović had to find an agreement with Maček at all costs and strengthen his bonds with Rome, where authorities were equally concerned about the Germans beyond the Brenner Pass. In a meeting with Ciano, held in Venice on 18 June 1938, Stojadinović proposed that the foreign policies of their two countries be “absolutely synchronized.”⁶⁵

Wanting to make the most of his trip to Italy, the Yugoslav leader met with Mile Budak in the Villa d’Este, on Lake Como. Stojadinović invited the exile to return to his homeland, and contribute to the reunification of the country. Furthermore, Stojadinović pledged to “facilitate [his return] in every way,” and ensure him “a tranquil life, filled with fruitful work.” Budak appreciated the offer, and spoke “frankly” about what he would be able to do. He would try to convince Maček, whose close friend he was, to relax his opposition to the government. While approving its political directives, he would not “openly” enroll in Stojadinović’s party, “for obvious reasons.” In any case, he would remain faithful to the two cornerstones of his politics: “the fight against communism, and a strong orientation toward Rome, with an eye to increasingly close collaboration with Italy.” Stojadinović had nothing to object, and Budak addressed the other matter close to his heart: if Belgrade was serious about favoring the repatriation of Croatian political exiles, it would have to reassure them by conceding “a broad amnesty.” The Serbian leader committed to granting an amnesty for all but “the men responsible for the regicide and their accomplices” by the month of December.⁶⁶

Budak returned to his country early in July, using a regular passport he’d been given by Milićević. Inspector Conti had provided him with “the necessary support” with which to carry out in the best way possible his activity in behalf of Italy. A dozen other intellectuals applied for repatriation, asking for assurances that they might “live freely and in peace.” It seemed as if they had lost all faith that the movement might

65 DDI, 8th series, vol. 11, doc. 237, 342. In 1935, the Serb Dimitrije Ljotić had founded the Zbor Movement, or National Yugoslav Movement (Jugoslavenski Narodni Pokret).

66 ACS, DGPS/AEC, b. 9/40, 26 June 1938, 1–2. Stojadinović charged Budak himself with the task of preparing the decree, together with Milićević.

ever recover, and distanced themselves from their leader to provide for “their own interests” as best they could.⁶⁷ Even the mass of private soldiers appeared to be disoriented, and many of them were pondering the idea of leaving Italy. Conti and Milićević made a long list of political exiles not liable to incur punishment for specific crimes and free to return to their country. Many accepted to leave of their own accord, whereas others only felt compelled to do so when Conti threatened to cut off their subsidies. Either way, by mid November, the overall number of those who had been repatriated climbed to 240.

On 11 December 1938, general political elections were held in Yugoslavia. There were three competing lists: one for President Stojadinović’s party, one for the Serbian and Croatian opposition movements united under Maček, and one for the pro-Nazi national movement led by Ljotić. Stojadinović won with 1,650,000 votes, while Maček’s list received 1,364,000 votes, and Ljotić raked up only 3,000 votes.⁶⁸ Votes for Maček had been nearly unanimous in Croatia. Frankists had been the only politicians to advocate abstention from voting during the electoral campaign. At the last minute, however, in a sensational turn of events, they too had crossed over to Maček’s camp. There were strong suspicions that the Frankists had acted under Pavelić’s command. Milićević went to Zagreb to speak with Budak. Pressed for answers, the writer admitted that Pavelić had provided “not him but another trusted man,” whose name he did not mention, with “precise orders.”⁶⁹ Milićević hurried to Rome to protest against the inadequate surveillance of the *po-glavnik*. Conti replied that Pavelić was under strict surveillance, and the police was keeping a close watch on every move of the whole family, their housekeeper, and anyone who had anything to do with them, as well as

67 Ibid., 14 May 1938, 1–2, and 27 June 1938, 1. Similarly, Lorković and Jelić were attempting to return to their country from Hungary and Germany respectively.

68 Stojadinović, *Jugoslavia fra le due guerre*, 280.

69 ACS, DGPS/AEC, b. 9/40, 29 December 1938, 1–2. After returning to Zagreb, Budak founded the weekly *Hrvatski Narod*, published between February 1939 and March 1940, and the association Uzdanica (Hope), which attracted a dozen other repatriated exiles and many students of medicine (Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i ustaše*, 314).

on their correspondence. There was no reason to believe—Conti told Milićević—that Pavelić engaged in any kind of political activity whatsoever. For months, though, the Italian inspector had believed otherwise.

CHURCHES AND CONVENTS

Even before Milićević arrived in Italy to make his complaints, Conti had telegraphed the chief of police in Siena: “I have been told that the well-known Doctor Pavelić uses foreign Yugoslav ecclesiastics who sympathize with the cause of the separatist movement to carry out his political activity and keep contacts with his friends abroad.” The chief of police rejected the idea that Pavelić or his wife had ever approached foreign ecclesiastics for any reason, but acknowledged that “the Italian parish priest of the Carthusian church in Poggiarello, one Surdi Dom Raffaele,” did visit their house. With due discretion, the local police verified that the Pavelić family attended Dom Surdi’s parish church diligently. As a result, it often happened that the priest would visit the family at their house, “spending a few hours there in conversation or in a game of cards.” Such familiarity was also favored by the fact that the church and the back of the house were separated only by a garden. Arrangements were made for the “discreet inspection” of Dom Surdi’s correspondence, and cautious vigilance for possible contact with foreign priests. Conti made a fresh attempt on 7 January 1939: “There are solid indications that a person of interest, probably a priest or a friar, will arrive in your city in order to approach with caution the parish priest who frequents the Pavelić residence.” The local police answered in mid March: “Doctor Pavelić’s house has also been visited, twice so far, by the priest Jannj Gaetano, [...] a resident of the Franciscan convent in Piazza San Francesco since 1938, who happens to be on assignment in the parish.”⁷⁰

By this time, censors in Siena were opening any correspondence that was the least bit suspect, and could recognize Pavelić’s handwriting at

⁷⁰ ACS, DGPS/AEC, b. 16/56, 1 December 1938, 7 January and 18 March 1939.

sight. As a result, they intercepted an “entirely encoded” letter he’d written for a Milka Gržeta, to be picked up at the post office in Fiume. Conti had the letter forwarded and put the post office box in Fiume under surveillance. A few days later, a letter arrived from Budapest, in which Mladen Lorković reported to Pavelić on the political situation in Croatia.⁷¹ Hence, the post office box in Fiume was used to sort the mail between Pavelić and his fellow men, and Conti let the postwoman, Gržeta, continue her work, arranging for her merely to open and copy the letters in transit—clear proof that while the Italian apparatus wished to keep Pavelić’s activity in check, it did not mind it altogether. So how did the letters of his devoted followers get to Pavelić?

Sifting through the mail, Conti found a letter from the United States addressed to “Ancellotti Vittorio, Sez. E. n. 92 III Ventena Siena.” The writer was Luka Grbić, a friar who was living in a convent in Pittsburgh. The letter, which started with “Dear Brother,” addressed the political situation of the separatist movement in the United States, and deplored Yugoslav communists’ attacks on the “Supreme Leader.” Conti had the letter forwarded, the better to identify its intended recipient. Via Ventena, just outside the city walls of Siena, was a country road that ran between olive trees; there was a mailbox in Ancellotti’s name, but it was a friar from the nearby Franciscan monastery of L’Osservanza who picked up the letter. Similar incidents were recorded repeatedly, until Conti identified the man as the Croatian friar Justin Medić, who taught in the monastery. In addition to being Pavelić’s mailman in Siena, Medić was a supporter of the Ustasha cause, who gave “advice and recommendations” to his brothers overseas involved in political propaganda.⁷² Conti wanted to know whether other friars of Medić’s nationality were present in the Franciscan monastery, and the chief of police answered that the five Yugoslav friars of L’Osservanza had left the city. Four had returned to their own country, while Justin

⁷¹ Ibid., 2 April 1939.

⁷² Ibid., 2 and 6 June 1939. Friar Luka Grbić was editor of *Nezavisna Hrvatska Država*, the official organ of the Croatian Separatist Party, in Pittsburgh.

Medić had gone to Florence, where “he would sojourn in a convent located in Via Ognissanti 32.”⁷³

Pavelić remained in Siena for a few more months, moving from Il Poggiarello to a small villa in Via Cavour. He wanted to move to Florence to be closer to his daughters—or rather, to have greater freedom of action—and, in November, was authorized to go there for a few days to look for a house. On that occasion, the police reported that he’d been to Borgo Ognissanti 32, in “the Franciscan convent with Ghirlandajo’s *The Last Supper* to visit a friar.”⁷⁴ From within the Florentine convent, a center of Franciscan missions, Justin Medić continued to scheme for the return to “Sacred Croatia.” “Franciscans not only spread Ustaša ideals from churches to numerous villages,” Zagreb’s newspaper *Hrvatski Narod* wrote in 1941, they also allowed Croatian fighters to meet with Ustasha leaders in monasteries “during the toughest period of the struggle.” To avoid giving friars all the credit, the reverend Dragutin Kamber, a collaborator of Archbishop Šarić, would later boast: “For the most part, we Croatian Catholic priests were among those who prepared the advent of independent Croatia.”⁷⁵

CROATIA BETWEEN ITALY AND GERMANY

On 1 January 1939, Mussolini agreed to Germany’s proposal of a triple military alliance among Rome, Berlin, and Tokyo, already united in the anti-Comintern pact. The Duce wanted the agreement to be presented to the world as a defensive pact, in order to buy Germany and Italy time to prepare for the inevitable clash. Also, he suggested to Hitler that they draw European nations able to supply raw materials into the alliance, namely Yugoslavia, Hungary, and Romania. By these means, Mussolini aimed to create a profascist bloc within the alliance, the better to safeguard Italian interests in the Balkan–Danubian region.

⁷³ Ibid., 9 September 1939.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 21 November 1939.

⁷⁵ Laurière, *Assassins au nom de Dieu*, 80.

On 18 January, Ciano left for Yugoslavia with the objective of convincing Stojadinović to enter the anti-Comintern pact, and making him accept the idea of Italian military intervention in Albania. But the Yugoslav leader was in no position to make such far-reaching decisions. Maček's success in the elections a month before had been so extensive that the opposition faced by Stojadinović was now relentless. Early in February, Stojadinović's government was overthrown. Prince Paul turned to Dragiša Cvetković, a sharp-witted moderate politician, whom he entreated to find an agreement with Maček as quickly as possible. While Belgrade attempted to regain internal unity, Mussolini and Ciano started reconsidering their plans. By this point, however, it was Berlin that laid down the law. On 15 March, German troops occupied Bohemia and Moravia, turning them into a German protectorate. Hitler favored the independence of Slovakia under Monsignor Tiso, and granted Ruthenia to the Hungarians. Within a week, Czechoslovakia had been wiped out from the maps. It was the end of the Europe of Versailles, and of the Four-Power Pact promoted by Mussolini.

Ciano proposed the occupation of Albania to give the Italian people "satisfaction and a reward." But Mussolini feared a misstep might push Maček to declare Croatia's independence and place it under German protection. The decision was made to defer, and to call Germany to a halt. Ciano reminded the German ambassador Mackensen that the Führer had committed to leaving the Mediterranean alone. That had been the bedrock of the Axis, and if Germans compromised it by meddling in Croatian affairs the Axis itself would break as a result. Mackensen answered that Hitler would never fail to keep his word. Mussolini did not feel reassured, and ordered a concentration of forces in Veneto: "If the revolution breaks out in Croatia," he told Ciano, "we'll step in. And if Germans think they can stop us, we'll open fire against them."⁷⁶ Ciano sent Prince Paul a telegram, informing him of Italy's request to Germany to stay put, and urging him to hasten negotiations with Maček

⁷⁶ Ciano, *Diario*, 52–62.

before it was too late. Ciano and Mussolini had no genuine intention of entrusting Croatia's fate to Maček and to the Serbian prince, however. They merely wished to buy time.

In the meantime, Marquis Josip de Bombelles, whom Ciano had met by chance while hunting in Yugoslavia, arrived in Rome. At the time, the marquis had been presented to him as "a country gentleman friend of Prince Paul," and Ciano believed him to be merely a courtesy call. Instead, the marquis wanted to talk to him about politics, and told him in confidence that he was "a secret agent for Maček." The divide between Croatia and Serbia could not be bridged, Bombelles said, and, if someone should arm the Croats, their rifles would fire against the Serbs of their own accord. There was but one solution for Croatia: "an autonomous kingdom headed by an Italian prince, and, best of all, one endowed with a personal union with the king of Italy." Bombelles did not make any requests. He simply wanted to alert Italy to the dangers of the politics of Belgrade. After Stojadinović's fall, the latter had become markedly favorable toward the democracies and opposed to the Axis. Prudently, Ciano answered that Rome would honor its agreements with Belgrade, but still suggested that they keep in touch. On 20 March, Ciano received an Italian engineer and entrepreneur active in Croatia, Amadeo Carnelutti, who was bearing a message from Maček. The Croatian leader was negotiating with Belgrade to obtain autonomy for his country. This would be his last attempt, and if it failed, Maček would declare insurrection and ask Italy for military help. A Croatian Republic bound to Italy by alliance would be established, including a customs and monetary union, and the two countries would later be unified under the House of Savoy. Carnelutti believed Croats to be anti-German, but likely to turn to Germany to break free from Serbian tyranny, if rejected by Italy. Ciano and Mussolini decided to "accept the Croatian plan," and advised Maček to abstain "from any contact with Berlin." Ten days later, Bombelles returned. He claimed the secession process was unstoppable, that "a subsidy [was needed] in order to carry out pro-Italian propaganda ac-

tivities among the Croatian masses,” and that all bets should be placed on Pavelić, “the only man of action.” Mussolini authorized Bombelles to meet Pavelić in secret.⁷⁷

On 7 April, the Italian troops landed in Albania. King Zog fled, an improvised Albanian constituent assembly offered the crown to the king of Italy, Victor Emmanuel III, who accepted it, proclaiming a personal union between the two countries. Early in May, Prince Paul and Minister of Foreign Affairs Cincar-Marković were greeted festively in Rome by the king, the government, and the new pope, Pius XII. Upon recognizing the Italian occupation of Albania, Paul and Cincar-Marković confirmed Yugoslavia’s will to continue cooperating with the Axis, and with Italy in particular, while maintaining its neutrality.

Persuaded that the relations of strength between Italy and Germany had thus been balanced out, Mussolini signed the Pact of Steel on 22 May 1939. During the meeting held in Berlin, Hitler reiterated that he would give Mussolini free rein in the Mediterranean, and even complimented him for the occupation of Albania. Heading back to Rome, Mussolini told Ciano he “increasingly” distrusted Yugoslavia and urged him to enhance Maček’s movement “through appropriate funding.” Ciano and the engineer Canelutti devised a plan that involved funding the movement with twenty million dinars in exchange for a commitment on Maček’s part to prepare the revolution within four to six months. Once the insurrection started, Italian troops would intervene on Croatia’s request to ensure order and peace. “Croatia will declare itself an independent state, federated with Rome; it will have its own government, but the foreign affairs and defense ministries will be shared with Italy.”⁷⁸ Mussolini approved the plan, and Ciano forwarded it to Maček so he could countersign it. Meanwhile, Maček was carrying out negotiations with Cvetković, and—rather than sign the agreement and hand it over to Ciano—secretly used it as a bargaining chip.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 52, 61, 63, and 69.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 105–6.

On 22 August, Filippo Anfuso, head of staff at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, learned from Marquis de Bombelles that Maček's negotiations with Belgrade were about to be successful. Croats wanted full independence, though, and were prepared to revolt alongside Pavelić, who now enjoyed "huge popularity." Ciano sent Anfuso to Siena to speak with Pavelić, and find out how long it would take him to prepare an insurrection, and how likely he thought it was that a rebellion opposed by Maček's party would be successful. According to Pavelić the matter was simple. He would only require two weeks' notice to launch the offensive, and Croats—who were ready to follow him—would drive out the Serbs and welcome the Italian troops with open arms. As to Maček, the *poglavnik* added, "I will make sure to render him and his friends harmless at the earliest possible moment."⁷⁹

A few days later, the negotiations between Maček and Cvetković came to a positive conclusion. According to the Italian ambassador in Belgrade, Prince Paul had accepted Maček's requests under the push of "the British and the French," who warned him against "the dangers of combined action by Germany and Italy."⁸⁰ Croatia gained broad administrative, economic, and financial autonomy, and Maček was appointed vice president of the new government, which included five Croatian ministers. At this point, it was most unlikely that Croatia would rise in rebellion, and Mussolini once again had to rethink his plans.

After signing a pact of nonaggression with Moscow, Hitler invaded Poland on 1 September 1939, and France and Great Britain declared war on Germany. Mussolini appealed to a clause in the Pact of Steel authorizing Italy not to step in for three years in the event of war, and stayed put with Hitler's approval. At the end of September, Germany and the USSR signed the treaty of friendship whereby Poland was divided between the two. The Church of Rome stigmatized the Russian occupation of Poland as "the USSR's invasion of the West."⁸¹ Cardinal

79 Breccia, *Jugoslavia 1939–1941*, 176 and 177n.

80 DDI, 9th series, vol. 1, doc. 472, 282.

81 *La Civiltà Cattolica* IV (1939): 378, *L'Unione sovietica e la lotta antireligiosa*, 377–379.

Maglione, the Vatican secretary of state, made it known to Ciano that Italy “could do a lot”; the ambassadors of Hungary, Romania, and Yugoslavia to the Vatican all agreed that “Italy alone [could] contain Bolshevik intrusions, by leading action in the Balkan states.”⁸²

In December, in a speech before the Chamber of Fasci and Corporations, Ciano distanced himself from Germany, defending the spirit of the anti-Comintern pact, which had originated the Pact of Steel, and claiming that Italy’s nonbelligerence would have to be changed into neutrality. He said it was necessary to pursue “the consolidation of peace throughout the Balkan–Danubian region by solving difficult situations in a spirit of friendship”; he further referred to the Pact of Belgrade, which ruled out war between the two countries “under every circumstance.”⁸³ Behind the scenes, however, it was Mussolini who continued to dictate Italy’s foreign policy, and while he said he wanted Yugoslavia to enter into the Pact of Steel, he also eagerly awaited the time when he could get his hands on Croatia. Sadly, Ciano followed Mussolini in the “frenzied dance” of conspiracy.⁸⁴

PAVELIĆ’S REMOBILIZATION

On 21 January 1940, Bombelles came bearing news from Croatia, where Maček was now considered a traitor and the situation was quickly deteriorating. The military effort on Italy’s part would be minimal, he said, because “popular insurrection will be complete and Serbs will be struck everywhere and destroyed implacably by Croats themselves.” Ciano reminded the marquis that by virtue of a nonbelligerence treaty Italy could not invade Yugoslavia, to which it was furthermore bound by a pact of friendship. There was a way out, though. “Our line of action,” Ciano said, “has to be as follows: insurrection, Zagreb is occupied,

82 DDI, 9th series, vol. 1, doc. 650, 402, and doc. 810, 513.

83 DDI, 9th series, vol. 2, doc. 667, 514. The speech was received with much relief in Belgrade. A few days later, Pius XII bestowed the cross of the Order of the Golden Spur on Ciano for promoting peace, and the rapprochement between state and church.

84 Sala, “Le basi italiane del separatismo croato (1929–1941),” 331.

Pavelić arrives, Italy is asked to intervene, the Kingdom of Croatia is established, and the crown is offered to the king of Italy.” Bombelles believed this was the right route and said there was no time to waste. Ciano reported back to Mussolini, who urged him immediately to define the main points “of the preparation and action” with Pavelić.⁸⁵

On the evening of 23 January, at Ciano’s house, in the presence of Bombelles and the head of staff, Anfuso, who recorded the meeting, Pavelić said he was certain of the insurrection’s success. It would be necessary, he explained, for “Italian troops—roughly 30,000 men—to enter Croatia as soon as the revolt breaks out. [...] [T]his will prevent Serbs from retreating to the territories of the old Kingdom of Serbia.” Croatia, Pavelić continued, “will be elevated to an independent state. [...] [I]t will have a monetary and customs union with Italy [...] [and] it will have a Croatian national army.” Ciano was amenable, but Italy was bound by the nonbelligerence clauses it had signed, and thus could not enter the fray at the first sign of revolt. The insurgents would have to set up a temporary government, and invite Italy to intervene “for the conservation of Croatian independence.” At that point, Italian troops would enter Croatia “led by the Ustasha presently in Italy.” At the same time, Ciano added, “Italian troops would enter Kosovo, with the aim of extending the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Albania into that region.” There was nothing left to do but prepare for action, which Mussolini would launch at the right time. Ciano ensured Pavelić he would receive all the necessary means “for an effective direction of the movement,” and invited Bombelles to return to Rome a month later with further news.⁸⁶ On 30 January, Pavelić moved to Florence, where, under the new alias Giovanni Fedeli, he took possession of a small villa in Via Goffredo Mameli 42.

The situation in Croatia was not as explosive as Bombelles made it out to be, although the agreement between Maček and Cvetković

85 Ciano, *Diario*, 216–17.

86 DDI, 9th series, vol. 3, doc. 194, 163–64. Some Croatian historians claim that during this meeting Pavelić committed to granting Dalmatia to Italy. However, accounts are controversial on this point. See Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret*, 450.

was indeed challenged, from opposite fronts, both by those in favor of Pavelić and Frank, who wanted to break away from Belgrade, and by Serbian military and Orthodox circles, which regarded autonomist or federative concessions as the first step toward ruin. In February, a bomb went off in the courthouse building in Zagreb; shortly afterward, several phone booths also exploded. No one claimed responsibility for these acts. The Croatian police stopped a number of separatists, including Mile Budak, and a dozen youths caught in the act of circulating leaflets containing violent attacks against Maček. Some time later, however, these suspects were set free. Meanwhile, in Rome, doubts were being cast as to whether Bombelles could be trusted, for after the meeting in Ciano's house he had vanished into thin air; finally, in May, evidence surfaced showing that the marquis was "a traitor in Belgrade's pay."⁸⁷

Mussolini entered the war on 10 June, a month after Hitler unleashed his offensive on the Western Front. In an appeal signed by sixty-six exponents of the Croatian National Committee, Pavelić asked the Duce to send his "invincible army" to Croatia, in order to rebuild "the thousand-year independent Croatian state."⁸⁸ But the Italian troops were already overburdened by the occupation of strips of land in France and the attacks against the British forces in Egypt.

In July, the industrialist Leo Grivčić, a strong Croatian supporter of Pavelić's party, after meeting with the *poglavnik* in Opatija (Abbazia), informed Italian diplomats that Croatian separatism was to be considered an accomplished fact; at the first favorable occasion, "Croatia would establish an independent state under Italian protection." But not all separatists saw things the way Grivčić did. From Zagreb, groups of Frankists had sent an appeal for "Germans to assume defense of the entire region, so long as they prevent Italian penetration." The former general Slavko Kvaternik—who enjoyed great prestige and was a candi-

87 It was likely Pavelić who presented proof of Bombelles's betrayal, for Ciano noted: "He will face the implacable law of the Ustasha" (Ciano, *Diario*, 262). Josip Bombelles died in 1942 in an Ustasha concentration camp. According to Krizman (*Ante Pavelić i ustaše*, 329), he was a spy for Prince Paul.

88 DDI, 9th series, vol. 4, doc. 848, 631–32.

date for the insurrection's military direction—was something of a mediation point between Pavelić's supporters and Frankists. Father to the young Eugen-Dido, Slavko Kvaternik had pro-German leanings, but also recognized Pavelić's political leadership.

In October, Pavelić informed Mussolini that the insurrectional forces were ready to take action, and suggested that all the Ustasas spread in Lipari, Sardinia, and other locations in southern Italy be concentrated "in one place." The Duce, however, was completely engrossed in his campaign in Greece, ruinous from the get-go. In ten days' time, Mussolini and Ciano started viewing the question of Yugoslavia with different eyes. On 11 November, Ciano met with the lawyer Stakić, sent on a mission by the ministry of the royal house. Belgrade proposed for the 1937 pact of friendship between the two countries to be revived. Mussolini encouraged such a course of action, and Ciano addressed the matter with Hitler, who reacted with enthusiasm. Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia were joining the Tripartite Pact, Bulgaria was about to, and Yugoslavia's involvement would secure the Balkan–Danubian bloc.

On 1 January 1941, while Mussolini and Ciano were negotiating Yugoslavia's entry into the Tripartite Pact with Belgrade, Pavelić sent the following message of good wishes to the Croatian people: "I have the solemn promise of the Duce himself that Croatia will not be forgotten. [...] [The country] will be assigned a very important role in the new order, so that it may be the link between Fascist Italy and National Socialist Germany." Early in February, Pavelić showed Conti a blacklist of 183 "dangerous elements to be eliminated" as soon as power was seized. The list comprised "Freemasons, Jews, communists," numerous spies (including Bombelles), several Serbian politicians (including the regent Paul and Milan Stojadinović). These were the early signs of what the *poglavnik* had promised his people: "We must experience fire, blood and violence so that our Croatia may rise."⁸⁹

89 ACS, DGPS/AEC, b. 15, 6 February 1941.

Part

2

**The Ustasha in Power,
1941–45**

The Independent State of Croatia

THE WAR AGAINST YUGOSLAVIA

If Ante Pavelić succeeded in becoming the *poglavnik* of independent Croatia, this was due less to his own merits than to a concurrence of favorable circumstances that originated from the intricate weave of the Second World War.

Early in March 1941, Hitler was absorbed in planning Operation Barbarossa for the attack on the Soviet Union, the most complex and difficult military campaign devised by the Nazi chancellor. Integrating the Kingdom of Yugoslavia into the Axis's sphere of influence was among the strategic requirements of the plan. On 4 March, during a meeting held in Bavaria, Hitler and Prince Paul addressed the issue of Yugoslavia's joining the Tripartite Pact. The Yugoslav regent hoped that by this agreement he would be able to keep his country out of war.

The prince had little leeway. Yugoslavia bordered with the Reich and Italy on one side, while on the other it was surrounded by Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary, already allied with the Axis. As Churchill wrote to his secretary of state for foreign affairs, Anthony Eden, "Prince Paul's attitude looks like that of an unfortunate man in a cage with a tiger, hoping not to provoke him while steadily dinnertime approaches."¹ Before entering into the pact, the regent asked Hitler for assurances on his country's territorial integrity and sovereignty. In order to win Yugo-

¹ Pirjevec, *Il giorno di San Vito*, 142.

slavia over, the Führer committed not to drag it into war, even accepting not to have the Wehrmacht pass through its territory. Joining the pact, therefore, was not a dishonorable capitulation, but still it would bring heavy political and diplomatic consequences. Indeed, by entering into an alliance with the Axis, Yugoslavia would sever its historical ties with France and Great Britain.

When the agreement was discussed in Belgrade, it provoked bitter disagreements within the Council of Regency, separating Serbian representatives, who opposed it, from Croatian and Slovene ones, who favored it. The final decision was Paul's to make, and after much anxious consideration the prince resolved to enter into the Italian–German alliance, in hopes of shielding his country from greater evils. On 25 March, the pact was signed with Hitler in the solemn halls of the Belvedere, in Vienna.

After this new diplomatic success, Hitler believed he had put all the pieces together for the invasion of the Soviet Union. However, the following day had an unpleasant surprise in store for him: at dawn, the citizens of Belgrade—first and foremost, its students—took to the streets to demonstrate their proud refusal of the agreement signed in Austria. The next night, a military coup overthrew Prince Paul and the government in power. The putsch was supported by the British secret services, which wanted to prevent Yugoslavia from being drawn into the Axis.² As Paul was forced to flee the country, the seventeen-year-old Peter II was proclaimed of age and placed on the throne of Yugoslavia. Wholly unprepared to play the role required by the events, the new regent was unable even to deliver a ritual message over the national radio. Nevertheless, the population rejoiced at the news of the coup. The streets of Belgrade were overrun by cheering crowds, which saluted this turn of events shouting that “war [was] better than slavery.”³

2 The entire operation—code name “Dalton,” after the Special Operation Executive (SOE) Hugh Dalton—was orchestrated in London (Breccia, *Jugoslavia 1939–1941*, ix).

3 Demonstrations against the signing of the pact took place in several parts of the country. See Goldstein, *Hrvatska 1918–2008*, 206.

"A clique of known Serbian conspirators in Belgrade has banded together with the British. The Führer will answer now,"⁴ Ribbentrop commented bluntly. Hitler took the military coup as a personal affront, and summoned the general staff of the Reich with urgency to examine the unexpected situation. According to the account of the meeting found in the papers from the Nuremberg trials, the dictator was enraged and determined to invade Yugoslavia. The deal was sealed with arrogance, for the military plan that ensued was called *Unternehmen Strafgericht* (Operation Punishment).⁵

The next day, on 28 March, Hitler's military representative in Rome, von Rintelen, informed Mussolini that the Wehrmacht would be ready to invade Yugoslavia between 2 and 3 April. Mussolini feared he would be excluded from the spoils, and decided Italy should side with Germany. He immediately replied to Hitler that he had "already ordered the transfer of all troops present in Albania to the Yugoslav border," and that if the war became inevitable it would be "very popular in Italy."⁶

However, the decision to invade Yugoslavia made it necessary for political interlocutors to be found within the country. With great timing, Mussolini told the Führer "they ought to heed Croatian separatist tendencies as embodied by Doctor Pavelić," who happened to be located "a short way from Rome."⁷ This was clearly an invitation to entrust the political government of the land to the Ustasha once military operations were over. On 29 March, Mussolini summoned Pavelić. The two had likely met before on a couple of occasions. Mussolini was forthright in addressing the *poglavnik*: "It's your turn now!"⁸ During their meeting, the two spoke about Dalmatia and an independent Croatian state: Pavelić was "calm and unassuming before Mussolini," and "his ways were restrained in a way that revealed his attempt to conduct

4 *La Civiltà Cattolica* II (1941): 159, *Cronaca/Germania*.

5 Pirjevec, *Il giorno di San Vito*, 144.

6 DDI, 9th series, vol. 9, doc. 795, 762.

7 Anfuso, *Da Palazzo Venezia al Lago di Garda*, 158.

8 Breccia, *Jugoslavia 1939-1941*, 617.

himself like a politician, and no longer like a terrorist.”⁹ The *poglavnik* was forced to accept Mussolini’s conditions, which included the cession of Dalmatia to Italy, even though matters by no means marginal remained undefined, such as the borders between the two states and the fate of certain cities.

Hitler made his own move, following a different route. He sought advice from Alfred Rosenberg, the man in charge of the Nazi Party’s foreign policy, and became persuaded that the best course of action would be to prompt Maček to ask for Germany’s help against the coup leaders in Belgrade, by offering him assurances of an “independent” Croatian state.¹⁰ Therefore, getting Maček to sign on to the project was the only requirement at this point. While preparations for the military operation were in full swing in Berlin, back in Zagreb, Maček was approached by two German emissaries who arrived specifically for this purpose from Berlin, Walter Malletke and Edmund Veessenmayer, and by the Reich’s consul in Zagreb, Alfred Freundt.¹¹ These men, however, had not received Hitler’s authorization to conclude any agreements. Hence, they were unable to make any far-reaching and binding proposals. Germany’s lack of resolve left Maček torn by doubt as he awaited a definitive offer from Berlin, which failed to arrive.

But Hitler loved to play on multiple fields at once, and so prompted his representatives in Zagreb to open negotiations with the Ustasha, too. Though the latter were considered exceedingly close to Italy, they were ideologically more akin to Nazi fascism than Maček and his Peasant Party were. German attentions concentrated on Slavko Kvaternik,¹² former Habsburg general and father of Eugen-Dido, one of the authors of the “masterpiece” of Marseilles, who was in Italy with Pavelić at the time. The elderly official had profound admiration for German cul-

9 Filippo Anfuso recounts the meeting, which he attended, in his memoir *Da Palazzo Venezia al Lago di Garda*, 160.

10 This reconstruction of the events is Walter Hagen’s, alias Wilhelm Hoettl, a high-ranking figure of the Nazi secret services: Hagen, *La guerra delle spie*, 143.

11 Bilandžić, *Hrvatska moderna povijest*, 122.

12 Hagen, *La guerra delle spie*, 144.

ture, which now combined with the passionate nationalism he'd nurtured since his youth.¹³ Thus, Veessenmayer—who met with him several times—did not find it hard to reach a collaboration agreement with him on the future order of an independent Croatian state.

On 4 April, Maček put an end to his hesitations and, rather than make a deal with Nazi fascists, chose Yugoslavia. Reassured about Croatia's autonomy within Yugoslavia, Maček went to Belgrade, where he took the vice presidency of the new cabinet led by General Simović. In Germany, after the agreement with Maček went up in smoke, it became clear that in order to solve the "Yugoslav problem" the choice would have to fall on the Ustasha.

Meanwhile, in Italy, the mobilization of Pavelić and his men was at the height of activity. The first contingent of the Ustasha army thus came to be formed, with roughly 300 men being concentrated in a military barracks in Pistoia. On 5 April, Pavelić addressed his fellow compatriots, making an announcement over the radio from Italy: "Croatian people! The time for your liberation has come. Organize yourselves into fighting units under the Ustasha flag. Rise up to cleanse our homeland of all its enemies, and establish freedom in our own home, in a sovereign and independent Croatian state, in which all Croatian lands will be united."

Military operations proved Italy's subjection to Germany. After what transpired in Greece, the Führer was straightforward with his ally: the Duce should take no offense if Hitler supplied him with "general points of view" and "ensuing instructions" in the form of "recommendations" and "wishes." In his capacity as supreme commander of the Italian army, Mussolini would issue directives "accordingly" and give the orders.¹⁴

The military campaign was quick and bloody: German bombers appeared in the sky over Belgrade on the morning of 6 April and struck

¹³ Slavko Kvaternik had married Olga Frank, one of Josip Frank's daughters.

¹⁴ DDI, 9th series, vol. 6, doc. 865, 812–16.

at length, causing death and destruction. There were over 2,000 victims.¹⁵ In the words of the Italian minister in Belgrade, it was a bombing among “the most complete for effectiveness and destructive results ever witnessed.”¹⁶

As it approached its decisive test of arms, Yugoslavia was in a pitiful state of decay, brought on by the lack of social and political cohesion of its society, increasingly divided for ethnic–national reasons and the interethnic resentments accumulated over the kingdom’s twenty years.

German troops entered from the north, and occupied Zagreb and Belgrade itself on 10 and 12 April, respectively, while divisions of the 2nd Army led by General Vittorio Ambrosio entered the country from the south, passing through the Albanian border. The operation was successful, and cornered the Yugoslav army. A high official of the Yugoslav aviation, Vladimir Kren, fled to Graz aboard his aircraft, offering Germans the kingdom’s air defense plans.¹⁷ Kren, who in previous months had been close with Slavko Kvaternik, was not an isolated case. In a panic, the members of the government abandoned Belgrade, and, together with young King Peter, sought refuge in Greece under British protection.

On 17 April, in Belgrade, the plenipotentiary Cincar-Marković and General Janković signed the capitulation presented by the commanders of the Wehrmacht.

THE BIRTH OF THE INDEPENDENT STATE OF CROATIA

At 1 p.m. on 10 April 1941, in Zagreb, Slavko Kvaternik proclaimed the birth of the Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, NDH) under the leadership of Ante Pavelić. The Yugoslav army was broken up in most of the country, the Drava Front in defense of Zagreb was about to fall, and the Ban Šubašić had left the city and

¹⁵ See *Leksikon NOR-a*, 58–60. The volume speaks of 2,271 victims.

¹⁶ DDI, 9th series, vol. 6, doc. 933, 869.

¹⁷ Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i ustaše*, 378; *Tko je tko u NDH*, 207.

headed south.¹⁸ Everything indicated that Germans would enter Zagreb in a matter of hours. It was a critical time, and Kvaternik decided to step out into the open. In the course of the morning, he called the main city authorities on the telephone, urging everyone to be calm and remain in their workplace. Then he wrote his speech and around 1 p.m. arrived in the Palace of the Ban, where—without much fanfare—he briefly announced the birth of the new state under Ante Pavelić before a small crowd.

By now, Kvaternik, whose every step Veesenmayer followed closely, was pretty much a German proxy. In the course of the afternoon, he appointed Jozo Dumandžić as mayor of Zagreb, and Josip Marković as railroad commissioner. Both of them were men of proven Ustasha faith.¹⁹ Then, he went to the radio station, and read the proclamation by which the independent state was born. The announcement was followed by a message with which Vladko Maček, about to retire from public life, exhorted all Croats to stay calm and abide by the new government. Though the message was nearly extorted from the leader of the Peasant Party, his legitimization of Ustasha rule was a grave political and moral mistake, which his subsequent repentance would not be able to cancel.

At that point, Kvaternik sent a telegram to Berlin personally thanking the Führer for freeing the country, and asked for recognition of the newly proclaimed independent state. The euphoria of success spurred thousands of people to take to the streets and sing the praises of independence. Indeed, when the German vanguards entered Zagreb around 6 p.m., they found a city in celebration and decked out with flags. A German war correspondent noted with surprise that the Wehrmacht was welcomed to Zagreb with more cordiality than he'd ever witnessed in any invaded country. The journalist failed to realize, evidently, that the citizens of Zagreb were celebrating independence, rather than the arrival of the Wehrmacht.

¹⁸ Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i ustaše*, 382.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 387.

In other Croatian cities, too, the birth of the new state was saluted with favor, though few people knew Ante Pavelić, and many considered him a leader “manufactured abroad” and placed in power by the armies of the Axis. In fact, having spent many years abroad, when the time finally came for the independent state to be established, Pavelić could only count on a very limited following in his own country, which the Italian consul in Sarajevo, Zuccolini, estimated as comprising between 20,000 and 30,000 people.²⁰

On the afternoon of 12 April, through the Reich’s consulate general in Zagreb, Kvaternik sent another telegram to Berlin containing a new request for Germany to recognize the independent state.²¹ If the answer was positive, he would immediately make arrangements to set up the government. Hitler and Ribbentrop, however, kept their word with the Duce, whom they’d assured, more than once, that any “initiative in the Mediterranean, most prominently in the Adriatic, would fall within Italy’s competence.”²² Thus, Germany would recognize the Independent State of Croatia exclusively under Pavelić’s leadership.

The *poglavnik* was still in Italy, together with his most faithful companions Eugen-Dido Kvaternik, Mijo Bzik, and Vilko Pečnikar. Their departure was imminent, but there were still quite a few tasks that needed to be addressed. On the afternoon of 10 April, Pavelić had reviewed all of his men in Pistoia. They had been provided with old Italian colonial uniforms and Beretta handguns,²³ while their garrison caps bore the letter U and the traditional Croatian red-and-white checkered emblem. After giving a brief speech, on returning to Florence in the evening, Pavelić had listened to the proclamation of the independent state over the radio. Even though Kvaternik had clearly stated that the state existed “under the leadership of the *poglavnik*,” the proclamation was evidently the result of an agreement between the general and the

²⁰ Kisić-Kolanović, *NDH i Italija*, 48.

²¹ Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i ustaše*, 421.

²² Anfuso, *Da Palazzo Venezia al Lago di Garda*, 161.

²³ On 30 March, Anfuso authorized Benzon and Artuković to enter Italy to support Pavelić. Cf. Gobetti, *Dittatore per caso*, 143.

Germans, the contents of which he ignored. Pavelić immediately got in touch with Anfuso, securing an appointment in Palazzo Chigi for the next day.²⁴ On the morning of 11 April, Anfuso accompanied Pavelić to Palazzo Venezia, where the *poglavnik* repeated before Mussolini the commitments made in Villa Torlonia regarding Italy's "rights" over the entire Dalmatian coast, from Sušak to the Bay of Kotor (Boka Kotorska, Bocche di Cattaro).²⁵ A permanent agreement on the borders between the two states was not reached, but Pavelić's commitment was enough for Mussolini, all the more so considering that the most pressing matter at hand was getting to Zagreb and claiming power before it was too late. Mussolini offered him an airplane, but Pavelić refused, preferring to reach the Croatian capital at the head of his army. The trip aboard the train was long and difficult. Once in Trieste, Pavelić and his men were forced to stop, as roads on the other side of the border were still unsafe owing to the presence of opposing Yugoslav military units. After a day spent making and unmaking plans, good news arrived: the Italian army had gained control over all communication routes from Italy to Zagreb. After twelve years in exile, Pavelić was about to return to his homeland as its recognized leader.

Still, the road to Zagreb was filled with hurdles. On the evening of 13 April, the *poglavnik* met with General Kvaternik in Karlovac, at Ante Nikšić's house, the future minister of internal affairs for the Independent State of Croatia.²⁶ "Ante," Kvaternik said to Pavelić rather brusquely, "I beg you to tell me this, what do the Italians want? Do you have an obligation toward them?" "I am under no obligation," Pavelić answered, "on the contrary, I have received assurances from Mussolini that the Italians want no part of our territory and will temporarily occupy some of our islands only for strategic reasons."²⁷ Pavelić's words reassured Kvaternik, but the *poglavnik* was lying, and the true scope of

24 Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i ustaše*, 395.

25 DDI, 9th series, vol. 6, doc. 912, 850.

26 Ante Nikšić served as internal affairs minister for the Independent State of Croatia from 10 October 1942 to 29 April 1943.

27 Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i ustaše*, 405.

the commitments made in Rome started surfacing the very next day.

In the meantime, Mussolini awaited news from Pavelić, which failed to arrive, while Berlin pressed for Italy and Germany to recognize the independent state jointly. “I need to get to the bottom of this,” Mussolini said. “We possess no assurance, other than the words Pavelić has told me, that is, that the Italian rights in Dalmatia will be respected.”²⁸ Thus, the Duce sent Anfuso to Croatia on his personal airplane,²⁹ charging him with the task of getting an official statement from Pavelić. When Anfuso arrived in Karlovac, Pavelić and Kvaternik gave him a telegram requesting Italy and Germany’s recognition of the new Independent State of Croatia. The text said nothing about obligations in the definition of borders, much less about Italian rights over Dalmatia. The matter was addressed merely by complementing the telegram with a statement to the effect that “the borders of the new Croatian state would be established jointly by the Croatian government and the governments of the Axis powers.”³⁰ The next day, Anfuso left for Rome bearing the telegram, which arrived on Mussolini’s desk that afternoon. During the subsequent days and weeks, the new-born independent state also received the recognition of Hungary, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Romania, Denmark, Finland, Spain, Japan, Nationalist China, and Manchuria.

Pavelić finally arrived in Zagreb on 15 April. His was not a triumphal entrance befitting a head of state. He reached the capital in the middle of the night, almost furtively, with a limited following of his most faithful companions. He settled in the Palace of the Ban, where some Ustashes had already set up a small guardhouse. The first matter he addressed in his new office was the establishment of the government, inaugurated on 16 April. Among others, the following men were appointed ministers: Slavko Kvaternik (armed forces), Andrija Artuković (internal affairs), Lovro Sušić (economy), Mile Budak (edu-

28 Anfuso, *Da Palazzo Venezia al Lago di Garda*, 165.

29 Ibid., 162.

30 DDI, 9th series, vol. 6, doc. 906, 845.

cation), Mirko Puk (justice and religion). The *poglavnik* emulated Mussolini and kept the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for himself.

The new government gave rise to a diverse political structure formed outside the law through conspiracy, limited in political horizon, detached from society and the real problems faced by Croats—not all of them stemming from the national question. As a reporter of Turin's *Gazzetta del Popolo* put it: "The current holders of power in Croatia are former terrorists. These criminals are now generals, ministers, ambassadors, newspaper editors, and chiefs of police, yet they have not changed. They've remained the same, including Pavelić and the ministers of his government."³¹

By declaring war against Great Britain, the Independent State of Croatia made its alliance with the Axis powers official. The Croatian military forces, headed by the commander-in-chief, Slavko Kvaternik, were divided into army, navy, air force, gendarmerie, and Ustasha militia. The latter was an expression of the party. The army (Hrvatsko Domobranstvo) comprised conscripts and to a lesser extent volunteers, and immediately suffered from a lack of equipment and weapons, particularly heavy weaponry. Nevertheless, it contributed to the war effort of the Axis with a few garrisons, active under the command of the Wehrmacht in the Soviet Union, and with two "legions," deployed alongside the Italian army. The navy, while formally established, was fundamentally ineffectual, for Mussolini forbade Pavelić from having a fleet in the Adriatic. Thus, with few men and a small fleet, its units merely patrolled the Danube and Sava rivers. The Ustasha militia, a Croatian version of the German Waffen SS, formed mostly by ideologically motivated volunteers, was equipped with the best weapons available, and became the tool and symbol of the government's politics. Indeed, the militia soon earned a reputation for brutality and ferocity. Ideological preconditions and consistency with the regime characterized the Ustasha control service (Ustaška Nadzorna Služba) as well.

³¹ Laurière, *Assassins au nom de Dieu*, 42.

The country's security agency, entrusted with police and intelligence tasks, was the regime's most effective repressive arm for dealing with domestic opposition.³²

Paolo Cortese was appointed Italian minister in Zagreb, but at the time he held the office of embassy counselor in Tokyo. Pending his return the following month, Raffaele Casertano took the function of ambassador. It was the latter that went to Vienna with Count Ciano on 21 April, and formalized the new Balkan order. Ciano and Ribbentrop agreed on the creation of a very large independent Croatian state, including, in addition to Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Slavonia all the way to Zemun, a town on Belgrade's doorstep. The country would be twice the size of the preexisting Banat of Croatia, with an overall population of roughly 6,000,000 people: 3,000,000 Croats, 2,100,000 Serbs, and 900,000 Bosnian Muslims.³³ Dalmatia would go to Italy, and the borders between Italy and Croatia would be determined through an agreement between Rome and Zagreb, which entailed, among other things, the personal union of the two countries under the House of Savoy.

Unlike the Croatian state, the other former Yugoslav regions suffered heavy territorial losses or disappeared altogether. Germany would keep occupation troops on Croatian soil along the Zagreb–Belgrade route, to protect railway communication lines with Serbia and Thessaloniki. A north–south line would therefore divide the new Croatian state, separating the continental area under German occupation from the area along the Adriatic under Italy. German occupation served another purpose as well. In fact, one of the most important aspects of the meeting in Vienna—an issue that was “likely more important than the [new] territorial order itself, though Ciano gave no importance to it”³⁴—was the definition of economic matters. Germany secured the

32 Another police agency was also created, which, unlike the UNS (Ustaška Narodna Služba), was not military, but civilian: the RAVSIGUR (Ravnateljstvo za Javni Red i Sigurnost [Directorate for Public Order and Security]).

33 Žerjavić, *Population Losses in Yugoslavia*, 31.

34 Talpo, *Dalmazia*, 315.

chrome and copper mines of Kosovska Mitrovica, but was particularly drawn to Dalmatian bauxite and requested from Ciano that German economic interests be safeguarded in the lands assigned to Italy, too.³⁵

Italy was about to fulfill its political dreams with the annexation of Dalmatia, but Germany was ensuring a wealth of assets for itself.

THE CROATIAN CHURCH AND THE NEW STATE

On 12 April 1941, a few hours after the State of Croatia was declared, Alojzije Stepinac, the archbishop of Zagreb and primate of the Croatian Catholic Church, paid homage to General Slavko Kvaternik, whom he congratulated on the country's independence. Four days later, the archbishop was received by Pavelić, who had just returned to Zagreb and been nominated *poglavnik*. The primate of Croatia welcomed the new regime, and did nothing to hide his satisfaction at the birth of the independent state. The sentiment was voiced in a circular letter sent to the clergy on 28 April, in which the Croatian state was characterized as "an age-old and ardently desired dream." The Creator himself was credited, for behind what had transpired "it [was] easy to see God's hand at work."³⁶

Alojzije Stepinac had been leading the Croatian Church since Archbishop Bauer's demise in December 1937. Thirty-nine years old at the time, his ecclesiastical career had been dazzling. Ordained in 1930, he had celebrated his first religious function in the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome. Only four years later, he had been chosen to serve as archbishop coadjutor in Zagreb, with the right of succession. During the following years, the matters the young archbishop was called upon to handle had been many and complex. In a multiconfessional state such as Yugoslavia, asserting the primacy claimed by the Church of Rome had been difficult. To be sure, the status of *primus inter pares* belonged to the

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Alexander, *The Triple Myth*, 61.

Orthodox Church, the denomination of the country's largest and hegemonic national group. Thus, in Yugoslavia, all Catholic dioceses decried the discriminations they were subjected to, the difficulties they faced in carrying out their apostolate, and the restrictions imposed on them in the teaching of religion and in the funding of religious institutions. This situation gradually led part of the clergy to overstep the bounds of its ministry and engage in an overtly political plane, favoring the identification of Catholicism and Croatian national claims. As a result, osmosis had taken place elevating Ustasha hierarchs to leading positions within the Catholic Action organization and the Crusaders' group (Križari). Meanwhile, in their monasteries, Franciscans of Bosnia-Herzegovina housed clandestine meetings of the members of the Ustasha organization. The archbishop of Sarajevo, Ivan Šarić, had openly sided with the Ustasha on a number of issues right from the beginning. The archbishop and his collaborators, Krunoslav Draganović and Franjo Kralik, formed a close-knit group released from Stepinac's authority both for historical reasons and on account of the Catholic Church's hierarchical structure.

In the 1930s, the association between the most conservative wing of the Church and Croatian nationalists had secured control over the only Catholic daily newspaper published in Croatia, *Hrvatska Straža*.

In November 1940, the Holy See received a detailed protest from the Nunciature in Belgrade: the Yugoslav government had denounced many serious "instances of intemperance" on the part of the Catholic clergy, focusing in particular on the cases of certain prelates who had taken part in "actual conspiracies," and acted as "propaganda or linking agents." Stepinac admitted that, "despite bishops' firm intention to demand the clergy's total abstinence from active politics," this result was "difficult to achieve, given the situation in Croatia."³⁷

During the years he served as the spiritual guide of the Croatian people, Stepinac showed increasing disillusionment with the Yugoslav

37 Blet et al., *Actes et documents du Saint Siège relatifs à la Seconde Guerre Mondiale* (henceforth ADSS), vol. 4, doc. 178, 269.

state, growing close to the positions of moderate Croatian nationalism.³⁸ After the proclamation of the independent state, in a circular letter addressed to the clergy, the archbishop claimed: "Knowing the men who now guide the fate of the Croatian people, we are profoundly convinced that our work will carry on with full understanding and help."³⁹ Stepinac's trust was well placed. Now in power, the Ustasha immediately reassured the archbishop on the complete freedom of action the Catholic Church would enjoy in the new state. After all, the new state, too, relied greatly on the support of the Church. Not by chance had the political authorities broadcast a text over Radio Zagreb on 11 April, urging "noncity dwellers to turn to parish offices, where priests would give directives on what to do and on how to behave toward occupation forces."⁴⁰

On those same days, Stepinac administered the funeral rites for Petar Kvaternik, Slavko's brother, killed in a clash with the Yugoslav army. The Ustasha paper *Hrvatski Narod* remarked to the effect that this step had established a close collaboration between the Ustasha and the highest representative of the Roman Catholic Church in Croatia.⁴¹ While speaking of close collaboration between the two was perhaps exaggerated or premature, everything indicates that a fundamental consonance of ideas and behaviors had in fact emerged between the Croatian Church and the new regime.

PAVELIĆ'S TRIP TO ROME

That Germany was open to Italian claims in the region made it possible for Mussolini to arrange negotiations with Pavelić aimed at obtaining the largest territorial concessions possible with regard to the borders

38 Stepinac's most authoritative biographer, Stella Alexander, claims his attitude toward the Yugoslav union changed after he was appointed archbishop. During the 1938 elections, he made a public display of his intention to vote for the Croatian Peasant Party led by Maček (Alexander, *Church and State in Yugoslavia since 1945*, 20).

39 Alexander, *The Triple Myth*, 62.

40 Falconi, *Il silenzio di Pio XII*, 348.

41 Paris, *Genocidio nella Croazia satellite*, 59.

between Italy and the Independent State of Croatia. In his heart, Mussolini harbored the obstinate dream of annexing the whole of Dalmatia. For roughly twenty years, he'd hinged much of Fascist Italy's foreign policy on this project, peddling rhetoric about the "sacred borders of the homeland" and the need for "vital space," with which he'd been able to persuade broad segments of the Italian public opinion.

Italy's claims on Dalmatia, however, were at odds with the area's history, as well as with the obvious preponderance of Slavs over other ethnic groups along its coasts and islands. According to the Yugoslav census of 1931, in the coastal region (Primorska Banovina) that included Dalmatia, only 1,580 people were Italian in a population of 895,000.⁴² As a result, the ambition of turning the Adriatic Sea into an "Italian lake" had complex social order implications, which were not lost on the military. General Ambrosio immediately realized that Dalmatia's Italianness was a remote memory preserved only in the region's monuments, and that Croats were hostile to Italian rule and willing, at best, to accept it as a temporary measure. Ambrosio and General Mario Roatta, the army's chief of staff, both recommended moderation when it came to claiming lands in the area. They were aware that once acquired such lands would pose thorny problems, where keeping control on the Slav population was concerned. As to the ways in which he would solve the issue of Slav predominance, Mussolini had his own ideas, however: "when ethnicity is at odds with geography, it is the [misplaced] ethnic group that must move,"⁴³ he had claimed during a speech before the Chamber of Fasci and Corporations, foreshadowing what we would now call a plan for "ethnic cleansing."

Therefore, Mussolini maintained his resolve to secure as much land as possible. After all, Pavelić had promised the Duce the whole of Dalmatia even during the meeting on 29 March in Villa Torlonia, according to Filippo Anfuso. The *poglavnik* would later deny commit-

⁴² Žerjavić, *Population Losses in Yugoslavia*, 195–96.

⁴³ *Il Piccolo*, 11 June 1941.

ting to this, and determining who was saying the truth remained a moot point. Pavelić had shown up alone at all his meetings with Italian politicians—on 29 March in Villa Torlonia, on 11 April in Palazzo Venezia, and on 14 April in Karlovac. Even later, he would never allow anyone, not even his closest collaborators, to attend the most sensitive meetings.⁴⁴

After the early preliminary meetings held in Zagreb with Casertano, Pavelić met with Ciano in Ljubljana on 25 April. The *poglavnik* made every attempt to explain that accommodating Italian demands would put him in serious difficulty back at home, while the men who accompanied him cited statistics to prove there was nothing left in Dalmatia that could be termed Italian, except for stones. A rather specific agreement was nonetheless reached during the meeting held in Monfalcone on 6 May.⁴⁵ In his diary, Pietromarchi recounts that Pavelić arrived in the station of Monfalcone escorted by cars carrying machine gun-wielding Ustasas, who looked like the “gangsters you see in American movies.” Italy secured the central part of Dalmatia, from Zadar (Zara) to Split (Spalato), the Bay of Kotor (Bocche di Cattaro), and most Dalmatian islands; the rest of Dalmatia remained in Croatian hands, but was demilitarized and opened to the Italian troops. Inland Dalmatia was divided into three occupation areas, over which Italy exercised decreasing degrees of control as the distance from the coast increased.⁴⁶

Thus was born the Governorate of Dalmatia, made up of the provinces of Zara, Spalato, and Cattaro, and entrusted to Giuseppe Bastianini. It wasn’t precisely what Mussolini had hoped for, even though

44 Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i ustaše*, 399.

45 Negotiations were very difficult; when confronted with the Italian demands, Pavelić turned ashen and said: “Italy may well annex all of Dalmatia, but it cannot expect me to be the one who cedes it, staying in power against the will of the people. My fondness for Italy already gives my political opponents grounds to accuse me, and the propaganda being spread in the countryside calls me a traitor, as if I wished to hand my country over to Italy” (Archivio Storico-Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri [henceforth MAE], Gabinetto Ministro e Segreteria generale 1923–1943, b. 1494, f. 2, 13 May 1941).

46 Burgwyn, *L’Impero sull’Adriatico*, 87.

Pavelić had accepted almost all of the Italian requests, exposing himself to heavy accusations of treason on the part of the Dalmatian population, turned minority within a foreign state.

The agreements of Monfalcone were ratified largely unchanged in Rome on 18 May, going down in history as the “Pacts of Rome.” Mussolini received the *poglavnik* with the honors accorded to the heads of state. In addition to a convention on the borders between Italy and Croatia, a military agreement regarding fortifications, the navy, passage rights and the establishment of the Croatian army, and a convention whereby Croatia was to consult with Rome on matters of foreign policy were signed. A joint economic commission directed by Count Volpi was also set up to promote the economic integration between the two states, in view of a future customs union. Lastly, the new independent state was bound to the House of Savoy, and bestowed the title of King of Croatia on Prince Aimone of Aosta, Duke of Spoleto. At least formally, all these measures placed the Croatian state under Italy’s broad tutelage.

The ceremony for Pavelić’s public visit ended with his appearance on the balcony of Palazzo Venezia alongside the Duce, and with an official banquet. In truth, Pavelić’s mission was all but concluded. He had arrived in Rome with a large following. The latter included, among others, Franjo Salis-Seewis, the bishop coadjutor of Zagreb. It was a political–religious delegation, which on the one hand attested to the Croatian Catholic Church’s proximity to the new regime, and on the other hand was instrumental to the private part of the visit—politically as important as the other one, though more discreet—with Pius XII.

Stepinac’s diplomatic contribution proved decisive when the Holy See pondered the delicate matter of the meeting between Pavelić and Pius XII. The Vatican could not disregard Pavelić’s embarrassing past, particularly the fact that the court of Aix-en-Provence had sentenced him to death in absentia for the killing of King Alexander. The Secretariat of State had therefore turned to Stepinac, who had asked Pavelić the crucial question. “My Excellency,” the *poglavnik* had answered,

“my conscience is absolutely calm and tranquil. I am responsible for this fact to the same extent that any Croat is.”⁴⁷ Endorsed by Stepinac, these words dissipated all doubts. The pope resolved to grant Pavelić a private audience, “in his capacity as a Catholic personage, not as a political man.”⁴⁸

Greeted in the pope’s private library, Pavelić pledged that Catholicism would inspire the Croatian people’s conduct and legislation. During the meeting, the *poglavnik* also raised the issue of the new state’s recognition by the Vatican. But the Holy See’s accepted practice—the pope pointed out—prevented him from speaking for or against the new state until a peace treaty was in place clearly defining all territorial matters.⁴⁹ Despite the precautions adopted by the Holy See, the meeting was an unequivocal political signal: the new Croatian state was born with the pope’s blessing.⁵⁰ This exposed the Vatican to the attacks and disdain of Western chancelleries: the British commented that never before had an important spiritual leader received an assassin of international renown with full honors.⁵¹

Once back in Zagreb, Pavelić gathered his government, displeased with the substantial territorial losses suffered by the country, and claimed the agreements just concluded had been a tough necessity in order to save the Croatian state. Yet this argument convinced no one, and some ministers left the sitting without saying a single word. The mood of the members of government reflected that of a large part of the Croatian public, which blamed Pavelić for yielding too much to Italy’s demands.

The signing of the Pacts of Rome ended the decades-long secret alliance between Fascism and Ustashism, a time when Pavelić’s terror-

47 ADSS, vol. 4, doc. 351, 494.

48 ADSS, vol. 4, doc. 352, 495–96.

49 The Vatican allowed for the private audience to take place, eliminating any aspect that might give it a political meaning (ADSS, vol. 4, doc. 358, 500; ADSS, vol. 4, doc. 352, 495–96).

50 The day before, Pius XII had received—in a private capacity—Aimone of Aosta, and on 18 May, after Pavelić’s visit, he received the members of the Croatian delegation that had accompanied the latter to Rome.

51 Pirjevec, *Il giorno di San Vito*, 151.

ist movement was a tool in the hands of Fascist foreign policy. A new period started in which relations would be regulated on diplomatic grounds through a balance of strength decidedly unfavorable to the young Croatian state.

Ustashism was an expression of integral nationalism and demanded the country's complete independence within its historical borders, fully including Dalmatia. Now, many leading figures of Dalmatian descent present within the movement's ranks were exposed to accusations of treason by the Croats-turned-Italian subjects living in the region. Thus, while formally allies bound by ties of friendship, Italy and Croatia were actually rivals divided by bitter enmity, particularly after the annexation of Dalmatia, an event set to become the main factor of discord between the two countries. These irreconcilable aspirations—Italy's to "Dalmatia as an Italian land" and Croatia's to the integrity of its national state—would become a serious hindrance in the relations between them, further complicated by German claims.

The Massacres of Serbs, Jews, and Romani

FROM THE RACIAL LAWS TO THE MASSACRES

A sinister warning of the abyss non-Croatian communities would be plunged into in the new independent state arrived on 16 April 1941, the day the government led by Pavelić took office. The Ustasha militia and the Germans burned down Sarajevo's largest synagogue, also destroying its rich library and archives.¹ A few days later in a speech in Nova Gradiška, the minister who presided over the legislative commission, Milovan Žanić, said: "Our state, our homeland, will be Croatian and nothing else. [...] We shall turn this land into the land of Croats, and cleanse it of Serbs, who have threatened us for hundreds of years."²

The regime's take on the "non-Croatian" communities of Serbs and Jews immediately came into full view. As in the cases of Nazism and late Fascism, this perspective was based on the understanding of nation in racial terms. Yet, as the Ustasha ideologues openly admitted, a "pure Croatian race" did not exist, for Croats were a European people formed through the contribution of several races: Nordic, Dinaric, Baltic, Alpine, and Mediterranean. As a result, the expression "Aryan descent" came to be used, cropping up in official acts to identify Croats.

On 30 April, a law decree "On Croatian Citizenship" went into effect. This piece of legislature established that the right to citizenship belonged only to those who could claim Aryan descent: "Jews and

¹ Scotti, *Ustascia tra il fascio e la svastica*, 82.

² Novak, *Magnum Crimen*, 606.

Serbs are not citizens of the Independent State of Croatia, though they may live in the state. [...] Only Aryans enjoy political rights.”³ The decree clarified that the state’s ultimate aim was the elimination of non-Aryan national identities. Use of Cyrillic was forbidden throughout the state, and the tax Serbian citizens residing in Croatia paid the patriarchate—the Orthodox clergy’s main means of sustenance—was abolished. Other similar measures followed: all schools run by the Orthodox clergy were shut down; the term “Serbian Orthodox religion” was forbidden, and replaced with “Greek–Oriental religion”; finally, citizens of Serbian ethnicity were compelled to wear a colored band on their right arm. As tersely stated by the minister of education Mile Budak, “one-third [of the Serbian Orthodox] will be expelled, one-third killed, and one-third converted to Catholicism.”⁴

Persecutions of Jews as well started in this climate. The government’s overt aim, as stated by Minister of Internal Affairs Artuković, was to “solve the Jewish question in the same way as Nazi Germany.”⁵ The humiliating practice of wearing a conspicuous yellow disc with the letter Ž (Židov = Jew) was enforced on all Jews fourteen years of age and older, whose participation in social, economic, sports, and cultural activities was further rendered impossible. The list of rules and requirements for citizens of the Jewish faith was supplemented by police directives forbidding them from visiting restaurants and taverns, movie and stage theaters, and even the market, or from spending time in the center of Zagreb before 10 a.m. Jews were effectively barred from all spaces of social life, and confined in a nightmare of fear.⁶

For the annihilation of political enemies, the regime resorted to special courts of law set up in major cities from Karlovac to Osijek. Bear-

3 Revelli, *L’arcivescovo del genocidio*, 41.

4 Stella Alexander claims Budak’s words were published in the paper *Hrvatski Narod* on 26 June 1941 (Alexander, *Church and State in Yugoslavia since 1945*, 22). Ivo Goldstein maintains that such a formula (“one-third, one-third, one-third”) never appeared on any newspaper, though there can be no doubt that the horrors the Ustasha unleashed against Serbs drew on it (Goldstein, *Hrvatska 1918–2008*, 257).

5 Goldstein and Goldstein, *Holokaust u Zagrebu*, 123.

6 *Hrvatski Narod*, 21 April 1941, 10.

ing in mind that sentences could not be appealed, executions by shooting were to take place within three hours of the verdict, and requests for pardon could not interrupt the sentence from being carried out, it's easy to see these special courts were but a show of justice.

In the climate of national exaltation that swept over the country in those early weeks, the nation's guiding principles were codified: "The center of gravity for the Croatian people's moral force rests on regulated religious and family life. [...] [F]aith and family are the foundation of an orderly, healthy, content, and happy life." Of course there were a number of corollaries to this, including the need to fight atheism, protect the sanctity of marriage, and "carefully cherish the purity of the national struggle."⁷

The contribution of Catholic fundamentalism to the emergence of a public ethics was decisive. Historian Carlo Falconi has drawn attention to how this created an unprecedented syncretistic ideology, in which religion was contaminated with biology and social ethics with confessionalism, whereby the state was made anachronistically puritan.⁸

Rather than focus on the ethnic-biological "purity" of the Croatian nation, the Ustasha were concerned with eliminating anyone outside the Catholic faith. While the Nuremberg Laws opposed the conversion of Jews in Germany, the conversion of non-Aryans—particularly Serbs—was encouraged in Croatia, where it was viewed as their only means of redemption. Indeed, baptism was seen as being able to deliver them from the original sin of belonging to a hostile and sacrilegious community. Only two religions could coexist in the Independent State of Croatia: Catholicism and Islam. Even Bosnian Muslims, considered Croats converted to Islam during the centuries of Ottoman rule, based on Starčević's theories, were viewed as the "flower of the Croatian people."

Thus started the conversions of Orthodox Christians to Catholicism. By May 1941, these had become mass ceremonies, in which Usta-

⁷ Falconi, *Il silenzio di Pio XII*, 346.

⁸ Ibid.

sha militiamen and Catholic priests baptized hundreds of Serbs at a time. For many Serbian Orthodox Christians, entering the Catholic Church by obtaining a certificate attesting to their conversion became the only way to avoid physical annihilation. In this climate, Ustasha squads had already started combing through all villages inhabited by Serbs, carrying out indiscriminate roundups. These generally took place at night: families were taken by surprise and only given a few minutes to pack their belongings before being transferred into prisons or concentration camps.⁹

The wind of violence first swept the medieval castle of Gospić, turned makeshift prison, and to the former factory of a chemical firm in Koprivnica, Croatia's first concentration camp, where roughly 3,000 prisoners—mostly Serbs—were held by the end of May 1941.¹⁰ As the number of arrests climbed, opening additional camps became necessary. One was set up in Slano, on the island of Pag, and another in Jadovno, along the Velebit mountain range. Located in thick woods near a sinkhole 1,200 meters above sea level, the latter was referred to as an “internment camp,” but it was effectively an extermination camp with sites used for the execution of prisoners, whose bodies were disposed of by being thrown into karst pits.

Italian army documents exist on the massacres that took place in Slano. The Italian army occupied the island of Pag in August 1941, causing the immediate evacuation of the camp by the Ustasha. For sanitary reasons, the Italians decided to exhume and cremate the corpses: they were able to dig up 791 bodies, 407 of them belonging to men, 293 to women, and 91 to children. A report drafted by an Italian officer provides the following information: “upper and lower limbs were tied in the case of almost all male corpses. [...] Machine gun cartridge cases were found near the pits, but lethal wounds to the chest, back, and neck produced by bladed weapons were verified on most corpses. The pits

9 Alexander, *Church and State in Yugoslavia since 1945*, 23.

10 Scotti, *Ustascia tra il fascio e la svastica*, 145.

had been covered hastily with dirt and rocks, before all the victims had died, as proven by the tragic expressions on the faces of most corpses.”¹¹

The atrocities perpetrated by the Ustasha were not confined to concentration camps. Many summary executions and mass murders took place in the summer of 1941, particularly in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Krajina, Croatia’s Serbian-majority region. In June, a squad of Ustasha—accompanied by two Catholic priests—arrived in Opuzen, in the Dalmatian inland, rounded up 450 Serbs who lived in the area and slaughtered them.¹² Survivors have provided detailed accounts of the horrors and targeted actions carried out in a climate of exalted fury. On 1 July, Vjekoslav-Maks Luburić “led a group of Ustasha in the village of Suvaj, where they killed at least 173 people, mostly women, children and seniors, for the youth had already fled to the mountains. Luburić’s expedition continued in the villages of Bujanj and Osredak, and in three days’ time between 279 and 330 people were killed.” By the end of July, at least 1,800 Serbs were killed in Lika.¹³ “The crimes, abuse of power, and acts of violence that are taking place,” General Ambrosio wrote to Casertano, “are clearly incomprehensible to our men, for they are carried out not by local authorities or bodies dependent on the latter, but by bands of unidentified men, who are not great in number (there were twenty or so of them in the area of Dornis, and about fifty of them near Knin, for example), but increasingly aggressive and bold with each passing day; these men carry out their every action [...] sustained by rumors of mysterious orders received directly from central authorities.”¹⁴ General Furio Monticelli commented thus: “Remaining inactive spectators, we feel like accomplices to these acts of violence and brutality, which will certainly be condemned by history.”¹⁵

11 Ibid., 148. In this early phase of terror, 24,000 people were killed in the camps of Pag, Velebit, and Gospić.

12 MAE, Gabinetto Ministro e Segreteria generale 1923–1943, b. 1493, f. 3, Notizie dalla Dalmazia relative alla situazione in Croazia, 22 August 1941.

13 Goldstein, *Hrvatska 1918–2008*, 266.

14 Talpo, *Dalmazia*, vol. 1, 475.

15 MAE, Gabinetto Ministro e Segreteria generale 1923–1943, b. 1493, f. 3, Situazione politica in Tenin, 16 June 1941.

Germans too were struck by what was happening in Croatia. In a report dated June 1941, the military plenipotentiary in Zagreb, Edmund Glaise von Horstenau, recounted that during the previous few weeks, both in the country and in cities, the Ustasha had gone “raging mad.” A month later, Horstenau drew attention to the “utterly inhuman treatment” to which Serbs living in Croatia were being subjected on account of the Ustasha’s blind and bloody fury. And he added that even among Croats no one could feel safe in that land, for the Croatian revolution was “by far the harshest and most brutal of all the different revolutions” he had ever “been through at more or less close hand since 1918.”¹⁶

The list of atrocities committed by the Ustasha in the summer of 1941 is endless, the details often blood-curdling. In Korenica, hundreds of Serbs were tortured and mutilated: nose and ears cut off, eyes pulled out, limbs broken; some were forced to hold red-hot bricks, dance barefoot on barbed wire, wear crowns made of nails; others were tortured with needles driven under their fingernails or matches lit under their noses.¹⁷

As early as the summer of 1941, the Ustasha carried out killings and other violent acts with programmed premeditation in a quest to destroy non-Croatian national groups.¹⁸ The mass murder that took place in Glina—a village south of Zagreb, on the banks of the river of the same name—was seared into Serbs’ collective imagination as a symbol of Ustasha violence. The account given by the massacre’s only survivor, Ljubo Jednjak, portrays an unprecedented orgy of violence. On 14 May, the village’s 700 residents, mostly farmers and the owners of small estates, were gathered in the local Orthodox church to celebrate their conversion to Catholicism through baptism. Before the function started, a unit of Ustasha soldiers stormed into the church asking everyone to produce their “con-

¹⁶ Steinberg, *All of Nothing*, 30.

¹⁷ Paris, *Genocidio nella Croazia satellite*, 120.

¹⁸ The historian Ivo Goldstein claims “the final decision to launch a politics of terror and genocide was made among the higher echelons of the Ustasha [in July]. It is no chance that the mass killings in the camps of Velebit and Pag started in that period. Taking a broader view, genocidal action by the Einsatzgruppen in occupied Soviet regions also started in that same time frame, and the Ustasha were aware of German plans” (Goldstein, *Hrvatska 1918–2008*, 267).

version certificates.” Only two had theirs, and these people were sent off. Immediately after that, the massacre started. Bogdan Opačić, the Orthodox priest, was the first to be killed, followed by most of the others. The few who were not killed on the spot were locked inside the church, which was set on fire. Mirko Puk, who hailed from Glina and was the justice minister under Pavelić, was among the instigators of this slaughter.¹⁹

The presence of Catholic clergymen was perhaps the most upsetting aspect of these atrocities. Their involvement was “so extensive one could hardly imagine a punitive expedition by those ghastly Ustasha squads without a priest, particularly a Franciscan friar, leading and inciting it.”²⁰ Many monasteries served as hubs for Ustasha activity and as weapon depots for operative agents, while ordinary citizens were being incited to persecute Serbs from the pulpits of their local churches. In July, Ivo Guberina, a key player in the Catholic Action organization and the chaplain to Pavelić’s personal guard, wrote that Croatia would free itself of all its poisons by any means necessary, including the sword.²¹ The poisons Guberina was referring to were clearly Serbs and Jews. The words of the curate of Udbina were equally clear when he wrote on the magazine of the archbishopric of Sarajevo: while men of the cloth had worked for religion seizing the cross and breviary thus far, the time was now ripe for them to hold the gun and rifle.²² It was no accident that the magazine of the archbishopric of Sarajevo published such explicit commentary: Archbishop Ivan Šarić was among the most enthusiastic supporters of the Ustasha regime. At the end of April 1941, the Ustasha government appointed one of his closest collaborators, Božidar Bralo, as prefect for Bosnia-Herzegovina. During Christmas celebrations that year, Šarić himself addressed words of praise to the *poglavnik*, adequately paying tribute to the man responsible for the foundation of the Independent State of Croatia. Therefore, exponents

19 For a detailed account of the massacre of Glina, see Dedijer, *The Yugoslav Auschwitz and the Vatican*, 165–71.

20 Falconi, *Il silenzio di Pio XII*, 382.

21 Paris, *Genocidio nella Croazia satellite*, 123.

22 *Ibid.*, 125.

of the Catholic clergy were not only ideological and moral collaborators of the terrorists, but also their accomplices, actively taking part in atrocious crimes. This was the case of the Franciscan Miroslav Majstorović of the monastery of Petrićevac, near Banja Luka, who—with help from other monks and priests—personally directed the murders of Orthodox Christians in several Serbian villages.²³

The Catholic monks and priests who participated in the massacres were mostly military chaplains for the Ustasha militia, and eluded, at least in part, the control of Catholic authorities. It is therefore impossible to draw definitive conclusions on the conduct of the clergy in its entirety. Nevertheless, the involvement of Franciscans in bloodshed, and more generally in actions removed from pastoral ministry, went well beyond personal adherence in certain regions, such as Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The massacres, as we shall see, persisted in time with macabre obstinacy. But a large part of the work of ethnic cleansing had already been fulfilled by the summer of 1941, in keeping with the Ustasha leaders' plan to eliminate as many Serbs as possible in as little time as possible, thereby creating an accomplished fact.

THE DISPOSSESSION OF THE VICTIMS' BELONGINGS

State-organized theft falls within the general scope of the extermination of certain ethnic groups and ethnic cleansing. Before being sent to the camps and killed, Serbs and Jews were systematically dispossessed of all their belongings, a practice formally "legitimized" by the government's decrees. Confiscated assets were managed by the state commission for reconstruction, later turned into a ministry, and assigned to Croatian citizens. According to Mirko Puk, the government's most radical anti-Semite, Jews' and Serbs' belongings were in fact the property of the Croatian people, to whom it was entirely legitimate to return them.²⁴

²³ Novak, *Magnum Crimen*, 637–38.

²⁴ Kisić-Kolanović, *NDH i Italija*, 60.

Companies and commercial enterprises were the first assets seized and placed in the hands of hierarchs close to government circles. Then it was the turn of real estate—with an estimated 1,200 units seized in Zagreb alone—followed by material goods: furniture, carpets, and valuable items were amassed in Zagreb in a building belonging to the office of nationalized property.

Fran Milobar, a law school professor at the university of Zagreb, was one of the few people to speak out against this colossal robbery in the course of a session of the Sabor: “Such greed to snatch as much as possible cannot be forgiven even in a time of revolution.”²⁵

The matters were made worse by the dishonest maneuvering and petty blackmail on the part of policemen and public functionaries, who promised safety in exchange for generous rewards. In the summer of 1941, the head of the political police in Zagreb, Ivan Britvić, ordered the arrest of a group of affluent Jews, negotiating their release in exchange for substantial amounts of gold and valuables shortly thereafter. The Jewish community organized a “committee for contributions to the state’s needs,” and, in a matter of months, collected 1,065 kilograms of gold coins and ingots, as well as jewelry and money in foreign currency.²⁶ On 31 October, the goods collected were handed over to Britvić and appropriated by the state. Yet this did not save the lives of Jews, who were once again arrested and sent to concentration camps. Similar negotiations occurred in cities like Sremska Mitrovica, Zemun, and Bihać, and the loot secured by functionaries was substantial.

ITALIAN OCCUPATION: MILITARY AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Once military maneuvers associated with the invasion were completed, the 2nd Army and Dalmatia’s governor, Bastianini, were confronted with serious problems of public order, partly stemming from the Dal-

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Strčić, “The Looting of the Gold Belonging to Zagreb Jews in the NDH,” 24.

matian population's aversion to the Italian occupation and partly the direct result of the violence and killings perpetrated by the Ustasha. In a report to Roatta, General Armellini bluntly wrote: "Annexed Dalmatia is restless, and openly hostile to us; we border with Croatia, equally hostile to us, or perhaps more so, even though officially that country's government does not show [its antipathy], or indeed hides it."²⁷ Instances of sabotage like the interruption of telephone lines, attacks on guard posts, assaults on motor convoys, and so forth were reported to be taking place in Dalmatia.²⁸ While these were sporadic actions carried out by small groups, the latter could count on more or less active support from broad segments of the civilian population.

The decision to set up the three provinces of Zara, Spalato, and Cattaro in Dalmatia after its annexation, placing powers in the hands of a civilian governor, had been premature and reckless. The Italian government, General Armellini wrote, had only been interested in "applying a layer of paint [over the surface of things] so that viewed from outside Dalmatia would appear to be made up of three provinces similar to Italy's and equally orderly," whereas "in any occupation against the will of the local population [...] military occupation must precede civil organization. This fundamental early phase did not occur."²⁹ This was the point of view of a military man—one constantly at odds with Governor Bastianini—but his analysis was sound, and the challenge posed by rebels a reality.

The onset of Ustasha violence against Serbs, Jews, Romani, and Croatian antifascists further complicated the situation. Representatives of the persecuted communities pleaded for help with the 2nd Army and the Governorate of Dalmatia, while thousands of people, in an attempt to escape the massacres, sought refuge in Italian Dalmatia, where some groups of fleeing Jews were authorized to settle.³⁰ In Lika and in Dal-

²⁷ Talpo, *Dalmazia*, vol. 3, 363.

²⁸ DDI, 9th series, vol. 7, doc. 368, 347–48.

²⁹ Talpo, *Dalmazia*, vol. 3, 360–61.

³⁰ AUSSME, Fondo Calderini, 38226/443, 29 May 1941.

matia, the Serbian community rose up. In June and July 1941, a revolt broke out in the area of Gospić-Gračac-Knin, with Serbs blocking railway traffic, cutting telegraph lines, taking prisoners, and killing Ustaša and Croatian policemen. A report by Italian military authorities provides the following account:

For the Serbs of these areas, rebellion served the sole purpose [...] of freeing them from Croatian oppression, and protecting the lives of those who had survived the killings. On receiving their signal, the men in hiding generally found their leaders among former officers. From their hideouts, they drew the weapons concealed at the time of the collapse of the Yugoslav army. Armed groups coming from Bosnia attacked Dervar knocking down the defenses of the *domobranici* [the Croatian army]. The Ustashas and the policemen were killed. [...] The number of insurgents rose as the latter were joined by other Serbs who, coming out from hiding, attacked and eliminated authorities, as well as Croatian and Ustaša units, in small towns.³¹

Some believe Italian authorities fomented the uprising of the Serbian minority in Croatia, because Italian weapons were found on some of the Serbs arrested by the Ustaša militia.³² There is no evidence corroborating this hypothesis, and most likely the revolt was only the result of the massacres perpetrated by the Ustaša. Still, after the revolt started, Italian authorities certainly stepped in to defend the Orthodox Christian population, for humanitarian and political reasons, as well as to come to an understanding with Serbian resistance bands.

In circumstances more and more dramatic with each passing day, the Italian presence assured Serbs of an impartial authority in the land, and was their only hope to escape death. Serbian communities in Dal-

³¹ Talpo, *Dalmazia*, vol. 1, 502–3.

³² Kisić-Kolanović, *NDH i Italija*, 260.

matia and Lika sent Mussolini a document requesting intervention by Italian authorities to defend the civilian population, further promising that Serbs would lay down their arms and hand them over to the Italians. Sadly, neither the insurrection nor the intervention by the troops of the 2nd Army put an end to Ustasha violence: often, Italian troops were caught off guard, had received no orders, or were deployed too far from where the plundering and violence were taking place, so that the Serbs continued to be slaughtered.³³

It was against this backdrop that the Italian army started its military occupation operations in the so-called demilitarized zone, or second zone (a strip of land running from Fiume to Montenegro, 50–70 kilometers wide and inland of the Dalmatian coast) in August 1941. The Italian army followed three principles in occupying insurgent areas: first, the local administration was to be placed in the hands of Serbs, where these constituted the majority; second, Serbs who had fled were to return to their homes; third, the Ustasha were to withdraw.³⁴ General Dalmazzo, commander of the VI Corps, allowed Serbs to occupy Knin, after the Italian army had already disarmed and expelled the local Ustasha. This action paved the way to collaboration: as a token of their gratitude, Serbs committed to respect Italian authority and agreed not to attack railroads.³⁵ Further, to promote pacification, Orthodox churches were reopened, and some Serbs were employed as an auxiliary militia in the ranks of the 2nd Army.

However, Italy's occupation of the second zone, its defense of Serbian and Jewish minorities, and its violation of the commitment to cede Split's civil administration to the Independent State of Croatia, sanctioned by the Pacts of Rome, drove a wedge between Rome and Zagreb. What the Ustasha found particularly intolerable was Italy's "pietism toward Serbs and Jews," when in fact the 2nd Army had stepped in against acts so barbaric as to be incompatible with any international military

33 Burgwyn, *L'Impero sull'Adriatico*, 99.

34 Nikolić, *Istorija Ravnogorskog pokreta*, 186.

35 Burgwyn, *L'Impero sull'Adriatico*, 100.

code, and which could be prosecuted as crimes.³⁶ Minister of Foreign Affairs Lorković sent Ambassador Casertano an official note stating that the Italian initiative undermined the sovereignty of the Independent State of Croatia, and harshly criticizing the methods by which the Italian authorities had pursued peace in the region.³⁷ Indeed, there had been excesses on the part of the Italian authorities. In addition to disarming Croatian forces in the area, they'd seized dozens of ships, fired Croatian seamen, killed Ustasha who had committed crimes, and intensified the special court's activity, whereby sending dozens of Croats to death—some of them guilty only of being in the possession of hunting rifles.³⁸ What is more, by occupying the second zone (and later the third zone), Italy had unilaterally invalidated the Pacts of Rome signed on 18 May, which ensured the independent state's sovereignty over those territories. Once peace was restored in the insurgent regions, the state of public order in Dalmatia improved as well, even though peace was more apparent than real, and balance was fragile and transitory. As the Italian military became increasingly involved in Croatia and Dalmatia, Italy paid a high price for this venture, on which it had embarked with exceeding carelessness and conducted with inadequate means.

TESTIMONIES, PROTESTS,
AND DENUNCIATIONS OF THE MASSACRES

The killings of Serbs, Jews, and Romani occurred under the eyes of thousands of witnesses. Presence of the Italian military significantly contributed to making news of what was happening in the region available to the outside world, as information was given to the Italian government, and equally to the Vatican by way of military chaplains.³⁹ Indeed, memorials, pleas, and protests concerning the murders that were

³⁶ DDI, 9th series, vol. 7, doc. 443, 416.

³⁷ Kisić-Kolanović, *NDH i Italija*, 194.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 189 and 203.

³⁹ Falconi, *Il silenzio di Pio XII*, 388–90.

taking place in Croatia soon crossed borders and reached Rome, as well as all Western chancelleries.

The first official protest arrived in the Vatican on 17 May, only a month after Pavelić's government had taken office. The document, which came from the exiled Yugoslav government and was directed to the Vatican Secretariat of State, denounced the slaying of Serbs in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Vojvodina, entreating the Holy See to take action.⁴⁰ Another document followed, personally signed by King Peter II of Yugoslavia and addressed to the pope himself: "In the alleged independent state of Croatia, Serbs are doomed to extermination. In order to make the extermination faster and more effective, one of the most brutal and hideous laws in the eyes of the civilized world, the one against Jews, is being equally applied to the Serbian population. Never before had a Christian people been humiliated and persecuted to such an extent by an authority also professing to be Christian. I appeal to Your Holiness to place my people, the victim of the most unjust violence, under the protection of your high authority."⁴¹

The president of Israelite communities in Italy followed suit, asking the Vatican Secretary of State Maglione and the pope himself to take action toward Croatian and Italian authorities, in order to alleviate Jews' suffering in Croatia, and bring aid to the concentration camps.⁴²

More accurate and detailed information on the massacres were contained in the reports issued by the Italian army. At the beginning of June 1941, only twenty days after Pavelić's government had taken office, the commander of the 2nd Army, General Ambrosio, wrote to Rome: "Arrests, house searches, devastation of private dwellings, and vexations of all sorts are an everyday reality, and violent killings are numerous as well, particularly in the districts of Ogulin, Gospić, Otočac, and Knin."⁴³

⁴⁰ ADSS, vol. 4, doc. 355, 498.

⁴¹ ADSS, vol. 4, doc. 393, 597–98.

⁴² ADSS, vol. 8, doc. 132, 250.

⁴³ Talpo, *Dalmazia*, vol. 1, 469–70.

Toward the end of the summer, a report on the atrocities committed by Pavelić's regime—containing eyewitness accounts, including some by Catholics, and chilling photographs—arrived in the Vatican. The head of the Red Cross in Belgrade believed only the latter could put an end to the massacres in Croatia, and thus sent Branko Bokun, a young employee, to Rome with this report.⁴⁴ Bearing a presentation letter for himself, Bokun reached the Holy See, and was greeted by one of Montini's secretaries, who took the report from him.⁴⁵ A week later he returned to the offices of the Secretariat of State, and the same person he had spoken with before told him that Monsignor Montini had had a meeting with Nikola Rušinović. The Croatian representative at the Vatican had denied any involvement on the part of Zagreb's government and provided assurances that the acts of violence addressed in the report were the doing of communist partisans, ascribed to the Ustasha and to Catholics out of ill will.⁴⁶ The report was given back to Bokun, and the meeting ended.

Nevertheless, Bokun's report, other news, and pressure from several sources did not fail to produce effects in the Vatican. On 17 September, Monsignor Borgongini Duca, the apostolic nuncio in Italy, met with Stjepo Perić, the ambassador of the Independent State of Croatia in Italy. Reporting back to Cardinal Maglione, the nuncio described the meeting in the following terms: "Regarding [...] Croats' known atrocities against 'Orthodox' Christians, Serbs, and Muslims, I told him the Serbs, many of whom I've spoken with, are most irritated by the violence perpetrated against them, which they blame on Croatian Catholics, too. [...] The Church," Borgongini had further told Perić, "neither can nor wants to spread its word by way of violence. Jesus said 'Go and preach,' not 'Go and shoot people.'"⁴⁷ The Croatian minister had been evasive when it came to rebutting the charges

⁴⁴ Bokun, *Una spia in Vaticano*, 31.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 46–49.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ ADSS, vol. 5, doc. 95, 244–45.

against his government, claiming that 350,000 Orthodox Christians had already been converted to Catholicism. As attested to by a signed note, the minutes from the meeting were “read by Monsignor Tardini and His Holiness.”

Hence, the highest echelons of the state, military, and Church knew the full extent and ferocity of the crimes carried out by the Ustasha. A broader public also was made aware of the massacres that were taking place on the other side of the Adriatic Sea and of the involvement of a part of the clergy. In September 1941, Corrado Zoli published a report on *Il Resto del Carlino* titled “The Birds of Graciac,” in which he claimed the situation in Croatia had taken on the aspects of a war of religion. In the journalist’s words: “There have been bands of killers that were, and presumably still are, led and inflamed by Catholic priests and monks. This fact has been proven many times over. [It’s like the] Middle Ages, but made worse by the use of machine guns, hand grenades, gasoline tins, and dynamite cartridges.”⁴⁸ If evidence of the killings and the scope of the violence that was taking place in Croatia compelled a newspaper in an allied country to report on them, nothing could be expected to stop the press and radio in countries of the opposing camp from divulging such news and denouncing the crimes of the Ustasha regime, which they did abundantly. The English writer Evelyn Waugh called attention to the cruelties committed by Friar Miroslav Filipović-Majstorović against prisoners in concentration camps.⁴⁹ The London weekly *New Review* further wrote that Pavelić had been unanimously viewed as the greatest criminal of the year 1941.⁵⁰

News of the massacres, which was now circulating broadly, worried the Yugoslav episcopate, too. The report Archbishop Ujčić sent to Rome from Belgrade on 24 July 1941 is particularly noteworthy, for it enumerates Stepinac’s attempts to “temper the vehemence of some Ustasha champions,” and referred to Pavelić’s command forbidding all

48 Falconi, *Il silenzio di Pio XII*, 383.

49 Alexander, *The Triple Myth*, 76.

50 Paris, *Genocidio nella Croazia satellite*, 180.

arbitrary actions. According to Ujčić, however, these measures had “the same effect of the cries against the *bravi* in the first chapter of *The Betrothed*.” Worried about the widespread “rumor that the Catholic Church approved of the vexations perpetrated against Serbs,” the archbishop of Belgrade therefore deemed it appropriate for the Vatican to send an authoritative personage to Zagreb, who could study the matter and “recommend calm, moderation, justice and charity to the local government, further warning that the authority of the state was harmed if people believed they could seek justice for themselves.”⁵¹

THE VATICAN DELEGATE

Ever since taking office in Zagreb, Pavelić had hoped the Holy See would officially recognize the Independent State of Croatia. This hope rested on the example of Slovakia, where a Nunciature had been opened as a diplomatic representation of the Vatican. Both Stepinac and the Italian ambassador in the Holy See set to work to this end. At first, though, the Vatican was rather firm in its stance: Slovakia had been recognized before the European conflict started, whereas the Independent State of Croatia had been established in the midst of the war.

The joint pressure from Stepinac and the Italian ambassador, the Holy See’s will to prove its closeness to Catholic Croatia, and perhaps concern about the news of the Ustasha’s brutal violence, persuaded the Vatican hierarchy to adopt a compromise solution, by sending a representative in Croatia as an “apostolic visitor” on a “purely religious, temporary mission.”⁵² Returning from a trip to Rome, Stepinac relayed the pope’s decision to the *poglavnik*. Pavelić appeared annoyed. He considered the Holy See’s offer unsatisfactory, and condemned it for continuing to hide “behind the usual pretext of neutrality.”⁵³ Indeed, an “apostolic visitor” did not enjoy the same status as a “delegate.” In other

⁵¹ ADSS, vol. 5, doc. 20, 104–5.

⁵² ADSS, vol. 4, doc. 547, 548.

⁵³ DDI, 9th series, vol. 7, doc. 237, 231.

words, he was not an actual representative of the Holy See. Hence, the pope's initiative did not entail to a *de jure* recognition of the Independent State of Croatia, but it amounted to a *de facto* recognition.⁵⁴ Accordingly, the Yugoslav minister in the Vatican sent the Secretariat of State a note: "The presence [in Croatia] of a papal envoy, whatever title he may be given, will produce the effect of a quasi-public recognition of the current political situation. If pastoral needs warrant it, the required powers may be delegated to a bishop without any prejudice to spiritual interests."⁵⁵ This letter was sensible and well considered, yet Monsignor Tardini's answer was blunt: no one had the right to tell the Holy See what needed to be done "for the safeguarding of spiritual interests"; the Vatican was not sending a "diplomatic representative," but an "ecclesiastic with a purely religious mission."⁵⁶ Clearly, the Yugoslav note had touched a raw nerve.

The role of Vatican envoy in Croatia, charged with the duty "of seeing and reporting,"⁵⁷ was entrusted to Ramiro Marcone, the Benedictine abbot of Montevergine, a monastery near Avellino. It is likely that Cardinal Maglione chose him because he did not belong to the Vatican diplomatic corps, which would underscore the exclusively ecclesiastical nature of the mission. He was, nonetheless, a greatly experienced prelate, who had been a military chaplain and spoke French and German. A partial concession was made to Pavelić by giving the envoy the title of "apostolic legate," one step higher than a visitor, and one step lower than a delegate.⁵⁸ When Cardinal Maglione informed Stepinac that the abbot was about to be dispatched to Croatia, so that he could "realize firsthand what the religious needs of the Croatian people were," he added: "There will certainly be an opportunity for the very reverend

54 On 3 August 1941, Stepinac wrote in *Katolički List*: "By this act, the Holy See has recognized *via facti* the Independent State of Croatia" (quoted in Paris, *Genocidio nella Croazia satellite*, 90).

55 ADSS, vol. 4, doc. 386, 530.

56 ADSS, vol. 4, doc. 385, 529.

57 ADSS, vol. 5, doc. 20, 104.

58 Alexander, *The Triple Myth*, 66.

abbot Marcone to get in touch with government authorities, and listen to their requests.”⁵⁹ Despite Vatican form and precautions, the mission’s diplomatic–political ends were obvious.

On 3 August, Ramiro Marcone and his secretary, Giuseppe Malsucci, arrived in Zagreb, where they were greeted by Archbishop Stepinac. Throughout their stay in Croatia, they were treated with the same honors and ceremonies generally reserved for official representatives of state.⁶⁰ In the same period, the Croatian government sent Nikola Rušinović to Rome to represent the independent state in the Holy See; the Vatican Secretariat of State received him as “a private intermediary with no official or unofficial capacity,” in spite of the two letters appointing him as Croatia’s “unofficial” representative.⁶¹

COERCED CONVERSIONS

Abbot Marcone’s first report to Rome from Zagreb is dated 23 August 1941. In the diplomatic documents of the Holy See, it was boiled down to a few lines dedicated to the conversions of Jews to Catholicism.⁶² Yet, judging from Cardinal Maglione’s answer, it would seem that Marcone had also addressed the issue of the persecutions against Serbs and Jews; the cardinal had urged the abbot to keep watch on the clergy, both regular and secular, ensuring they all kept out of political matters, “while lending their loyal and disinterested collaboration to civil authorities.”⁶³

In the documents made public by the Holy See, no trace is left of the complex matter raised early in July by the circular whereby the justice

⁵⁹ ADSS, vol. 5, doc. 21, 106.

⁶⁰ Alexander, *The Triple Myth*, 67.

⁶¹ In addition to a letter by Foreign Affairs Minister Lorković, Rušinović bore a letter by Abbot Marcone, corroborating the “unofficial” nature of the mission (ADSS, vol. 5, doc. 233, 401–2). A physician by profession before being appointed as representative at the Holy See, Nikola Rušinović had served as political counselor at the Roman embassy of the Independent State of Croatia.

⁶² Only a few lines of Marcone’s report were published; the part on the situation he’d found in Croatia upon his arrival was omitted (ADSS, vol. 8, doc. 139, 261–62).

⁶³ ADSS, vol. 8, doc. 139, 261–62.

and Ministry of Religious Affairs notified bishop ordinaries of the ways Orthodox Christians were to be accepted within the Catholic Church. While this initiative constituted a serious intrusion on the part of the government in the sphere of religion, Stepinac accepted it, relaying the circular to all the parishes in his diocese.

Essentially, the Croatian Church looked kindly on the practice of conversions, which it considered a return to the original faith. A number of articles by Krunoslav Draganović consistent with this view appeared in the regime press in the spring of 1941. In these articles, the author claimed many Catholics had passed to Orthodoxy during the centuries-long Ottoman domination in the Balkans. As a result, current conversions were in fact simply a return to the faith of ancestors.⁶⁴ Stepinac himself, on the issue of *Katolički List* dated 15 May, urged the clergy to welcome into the Catholic Church only those “who sincerely wanted to join and were persuaded of the truth of our holy faith.” According to the archbishop, “several thousand” schismatics had abandoned Catholicism during the previous two decades “under direct or indirect pressure by the authorities.” These people deserved “great understanding,” and indeed everything possible needed to be done “to bring them back into the real Church.”⁶⁵ In the summer of 1941, another initiative by the Ustasha authorities amounted to an encroachment on the Church’s jurisdiction: the ministry’s Religion Department—led by the Franciscan friar Radoslav Glavaš—started recruiting priests to be employed as “missionaries” in the rebaptism campaigns carried out by the Ustasha command, by local hierarchs or by an organization called Pnova (Drzavno Ravnateljstvo za Ponuvu [State Directorate for Renewal]), overseen by Friar Justin Medić, a close collaborator to Pavelić during his time in Siena.⁶⁶ This mobilization came in addition to the one carried out by proper Ustasha military chaplains and,

64 Alexander, *Church and State in Yugoslavia since 1945*, 26.

65 Falconi, *Il silenzio di Pio XII*, 358.

66 Ibid., 384. Stella Alexander claims the initiative was taken to expedite the practice of conversion, and parish priests were “recruited” without the consent of their respective bishops (Alexander, *Church and State in Yugoslavia since 1945*, 27).

by depleting parishes, contaminated the improvised missionaries with fanaticism.⁶⁷ The appointment of these “missionaries” by political authorities effectively removed the control of many priests from the jurisdiction of the Church, with resulting unease within the episcopate. Between 18 and 20 November 1941, an episcopal conference was held in Zagreb, with only seven out of twelve ordinaries in attendance. In the presence of the apostolic legate Marcone, the issue of the conversions was once again addressed. This time, the conference took a more resolute position on the matter in a document for the *poglavnik*, opposing initiatives by government authorities. According to the document, assessing and deciding on petitions concerning the transition of Serbian Orthodox Christians to the Catholic faith was the prerogative of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Further, no one excepting said hierarchy had the right to appoint “missionaries” to promote conversions. Missionaries were to receive their mission from local ordinaries. It went against Catholic dogma and canon for civil authorities to take action without consent from the diocesan ordinary. The work of missionaries was to be submitted only to local ordinaries, and the Catholic Church would deem conversions valid only if carried out in harmony with these principles. Also, the episcopal conference nominated a committee charged with the task of overseeing conversions, whose members were Archbishop Stepinac, the bishop of Senj, Viktor Burić, and the apostolic administrator of the diocese of Križevci, Janko Šimrak. Lastly, the document absolved the Ustasha hierarchy, claiming mistakes made thus far in the matter of conversions could not be ascribed to the government, but to “irresponsible elements” who were reacting “to the politics of the last two decades, and to the crimes of Chetniks and communists, guilty of violence against our peaceful Croatian people.”⁶⁸

This conference was the last one held by bishops before the war’s end, and the resulting document engendered some resentment in gov-

67 Falconi, *Il silenzio di Pio XII*, 384.

68 Ibid., 370.

ernment circles. Still, the following events prove that the episcopate's stance did not produce any changes in the ways in which conversions were administered. These continued to occur under the direction of the ministry's Religion Department and Ponova, while the committee comprising the three bishops is not known ever to have assembled. Regardless, it is striking that the conference eluded all evidence to the effect that the conversions of Orthodox Christians had taken place under threat of physical annihilation, and that therefore they could not be seen as an expression of free will. The archbishop of Belgrade Ujčić was alone in voicing concern on the value of the conversions, when he asked himself: "*Cui bono*, if religious conviction is absent?"⁶⁹

After the war, during a trial in which he was the main defendant, Stepinac was called into question in relation to religious authorities' complete subservience to the Ustasha. Indeed, the Croatian Church had never opposed the practice of coerced conversion, thereby conniving with the regime. The archbishop claimed the committee "could not" operate "for reasons of force majeure," but each bishop had "worked in his own territory." This otherwise elusive answer nevertheless indicated that during the Ustasha regime Stepinac had not been able to get the Croatian Church to conduct itself and tackle the many issues at hand with one accord. Surely, bishops' assessments of the situation—and their resulting approaches—were very diverse, ranging from conciliatory to unyielding to the Ustasha hierarchy. For instance, in June 1941, Mišić, the bishop of Mostar, issued a circular letter to the priests of his diocese urging them not to administer absolution to the perpetrators of violence: the Church would not and could not "absolve, nor deliver of their sins, all those people who in opposition to divine laws had killed, annihilated, or taken from others."⁷⁰ Conversely, Šarić, the archbishop of Sarajevo, systematically encouraged mass conversions, and addressed poems and apologies to the *poglavnik*, publishing them on the paper of his diocese.

69 ADSS, vol. 5, doc. 20, 105.

70 Laurière, *Assassins au nom de Dieu*, 153.

Spurred by the repeated calls to action from the Yugoslav minister, the Holy See made its voice heard on the matter of forced conversions, too, albeit belatedly. The Secretariat of State claimed that, according to the principles of doctrine, conversion was supposed to be the result of the soul's adherence to the truth of the Catholic Church, without outside coercion; therefore, adults could be baptized only if they were fully aware of the consequences of the act they were about to perform.⁷¹ While formally unexceptionable, these statements clashed with the overt reality that conversion were administered not only in a summary way, but under the pressing threat of death.

JASENOVAC

In the summer of 1941, Italy's massive military presence in Dalmatia and its occupation of the second zone forced the Ustasha to abandon the concentration camps of Slano and Jadovno, and transfer prisoners in a more remote continental area, inaccessible to foreigners.

A concentration camp was first set up in the village of Krapje, 12 kilometers west of Jasenovac. Placed where the Una flows into the Sava, along the railroad connecting Zagreb and Belgrade, Jasenovac was a small but prosperous town before the war, with a population of about 2,000 people, mostly Serbs who worked in local brick- and metalwork factories. In the summer of 1941, however, the Ustasha took this small community by storm. All the inhabitants were deported or killed, and in their place a permanent garrison of the Ustasha security service settled in.

Prisoners started arriving in the area early in September. The number of detainees soon saturated the first camp's capacity, and a second one was built nearby, between Jasenovac and Krapje, on the banks of the Strug, another tributary of the Sava. Both camps, which would come to be called Camp I and Camp II, lay in flatland, a swampy and unhealthy

⁷¹ ADSS, vol. 5, doc. 224, 393–94.

area subject to frequent flooding by the large rivers that flowed in the plain. By the end of September, the interned were a few thousand—all of them Serbs, Jews, Romani, or Croats. Among them were merchants, industrialists, engineers, employees, and medical doctors. It was the prisoners themselves that put up the buildings in the two camps, and raised the banks along the Sava, working up to sixteen hours a day, in inhumane conditions. In addition to the hardship suffered in connection to the construction of the two camps, prisoners were the targets of abuse and violence on the part of the Ustasha. One form of punishment—called “trap”—was a barbed wire cage left out in the open in which one or more detainees would be held for days at a time without food or water.⁷² Hardships, privations, respiratory diseases, and other serious illnesses soon caused the death of hundreds of men and women, and hundreds more were liquidated by the Ustasha in the camp by violent means.

In November, when the rains arrived, the hydraulic works built for containment could not prevent the Strug and the Sava from overflowing, completely flooding the two camps and rendering them impracticable. At that point, the Ustasha decided to build a camp in Jasenovac, near the brickwork factory. On 15 November, Vjekoslav Maks Luburić, the commander of the Ustaška Obrana, a special division of the security service charged with the direction of concentration camps in the territory of the independent state, ordered the elimination of about 600 prisoners who were ill or otherwise unfit to move. The two camps now housed roughly 700 detainees, who were forced to carry stone blocks, bricks, and other material by hand for the construction of the new camp.⁷³ By the time the latter was set up, only 250 prisoners had survived the unprecedented trials to which they’d been subjected. These prisoners became the first occupants of Jasenovac III.

In the preceding months, Maks Luburić had been invited to Germany by the Gestapo to study that country’s camp system. With this

⁷² Zemaljska Komisija Hrvatske za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača, 8.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 36–37.

experience in hand, he was able to organize Jasenovac more efficiently than the other two camps, where internment and liquidation had taken place in a more improvised way.⁷⁴ Located east of the town, its entrance on the road to Stara Gradiška, the camp stretched out for about a kilometer and a half. A wall 3 meters high protected it on three sides, whereas the Sava ran along the fourth, serving as a natural barrier against attempts to escape. Near the entrance, in the western part of the camp, administration headquarters included a watchtower 24 meters high, which dominated the entire camp. Toward the river, a wooden pontoon—called Granik—extended onto the Sava. It was generally used to put boats into the water, or to haul them out, but it also became the site for most executions: after the prisoners were killed, they were thrown into the Sava.

Between the end of 1941 and mid-1942, additional buildings were erected, by which the camp was turned into a small industrial settlement devoted to the manufacture of goods for the Croatian army. One was the so-called main building, used by the Ustasha to stock finished products. Further south, a second construction was called the “bells warehouse,” because it initially served as a repository for bells taken from destroyed Orthodox churches. During the four years of the camp’s operation, the warehouse would turn into a torture chamber for prisoners condemned to die of hunger and thirst. Forced labor took place in the camp’s northern section, in an industrial facility called the “chain factory,” where a smith, a workshop, a foundry, and a rifle factory were all located. The camp was divided into three units, or sections: III A was reserved to Serbs, III B to Jews, and III C to Croats, mostly communists or members of the political opposition. Later, section III D was built for Romani. Prisoners reached Jasenovac by rail wagon or truck, or on foot. Each week, smaller or larger groups of people arrived in front of administration headquarters, where they were lined up and

74 Kevo, “Počeci logora Jasenovac,” 478; Scotti, *Ustascia tra il fascio e la svastica*, 158.

registered by the commander or by his collaborators.⁷⁵ On entering the camp, prisoners were stripped of all their belongings: watches, books, money, and even clothes.

The food served to detainees was not nutritious and given in inadequate amounts. Breakfast consisted of hot water and a handful of corn kernels; lunch was a mealy soup with little in the way of vegetables, a potato and some beans; the same ration was supplied for supper. In Otto Breyer's words: "During my time as a prisoner in Jasenovac, I often saw rail wagons full of food and packages for the prisoners sent by businessmen and the Jewish religious communities of Osijek and Zagreb. Yet the prisoners were only fed beans and potatoes, while everything else—rice, coffee, sugar, and more—was withheld by the Ustaša guards."⁷⁶

The food served to detainees contained no fat, and very little salt. Weakened in their physical strength, prisoners were exposed to all kinds of diseases. During the summer, dysentery or typhus epidemics generally broke out in the camp: 1,800 prisoners died in just one month in July 1942. The physicians and nurses who looked after the sick were prisoners themselves. Despite their great humanity and dedication, they had very little medicine and equipment at their disposal, and could not perform any kind of surgery.

Soon, the facility's overall capacity was expanded with another camp being set up near town: preexisting industrial buildings, formerly used for tanning and leather working, were enclosed and turned into a single compound called Jasenovac IV. The whole complex—warehouses, workshops, power plant, tanning vats, offices, and worker dormitories—formed a single camp, in which all those interned were compelled to work. The whole colony was referred to as the "tannery," for leather products to be used by the army were manufactured there. Prisoners held in this complex enjoyed better food and better living condi-

⁷⁵ Zemaljska Komisija Hrvatske za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača, 16.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

tion than those detained in Camp III. Finally, not far from Jasenovac, another camp was set up in Stara Gradiška, which the Ustashas called Camp V. Jointly, Jasenovac's five camps could house up to 7,000 prisoners, but the latter never exceeded three to four thousand, even when all of the workshops in Camp III were operational.⁷⁷

Jasenovac actually served as the center of a network of concentration camps spread in other locations in Croatia, including Jastrebarsko, Gornja Rijeka, Sisak, Lepoglava, and Djakovo. As these camps filled up, prisoners were dispatched to Jasenovac.

As to the inner workings of Jasenovac III, a firsthand account exists by one of the men in charge of the camp, Ljubo Miloš, tried for his crimes at the end of the war: "First, I must explain that the prisoners sent to Jasenovac fell into two categories. Those who bore an administrative order were entered into the camp registry, while those who did not weren't registered at all. More numerous by far, the latter were immediately sent off to be killed. Among those who arrived with an administrative order in hand were people sentenced to between six months and three years in jail. Most of those sentenced to three years were likewise killed. [...] These were the orders of Luburić. [...] As far as I know, any time he went to Zagreb to report [on the camp], Luburić met with Pavelić and informed him about everything. More than once, Luburić told me that he did nothing arbitrarily, but followed the orders of his highest superiors, that is to say, the orders of Pavelić."⁷⁸

Some luckier prisoners were assigned to coordination or management positions, helped the Ustasha guards, and enjoyed better living conditions than the other detainees. Thus, a kind of competition emerged between Serbs and Jews to rise to these managerial roles within the camp, for these led to material privileges and, above all, to an extended survival. Indeed, not all those who were taken to Jasenovac were killed; some prisoners, individually or in groups, were released.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 9.

⁷⁸ Scotti, *Ustascia tra il fascio e la svastica*, 158.

Egon Berger, detained in the camp for a long time, described some of the methods for the physical elimination of prisoners: “Starting in December 1941, I worked as a collaborator in Jasenovac, and at the time my partners and I would burn the corpses of 200–300 victims per day. The executions were carried out in the following way. Pits three to eight square meters in size were prepared. While we dug out the pits, the Ustashes under the command of Lieutenant Mujica killed the victims, who were tied up with metal wire, with a blow to the temporal region.”⁷⁹

The most violent phase in the camps of Jasenovac lasted until the end of 1942. Between early 1943 and August 1944, there were no more mass executions. After that time, the latter were resumed, however, and continued until the camps were finally destroyed in April 1945.

The Ustashes followed the Germans’ example and built a cremation chamber in Jasenovac III, which they used to burn their victims’ bodies, thereby erasing all traces of the mass murders. The cremation chamber was put into function in February 1942, but was destroyed only three months later, in May. An international commission’s impending visit to Jasenovac probably compelled the Ustashes to make this decision. By the beginning of 1942, news of the existence of the camp in Jasenovac and of the crimes that took place there daily had reached the West, and as a result both the International Red Cross and other authorities asked to be allowed to conduct an inspection. The international commission that visited the camp was made up of German, Italian, and Hungarian members, whose respective governments were allied with the Ustasha regime and had little interest in exposing any atrocities. Nevertheless, the men in charge of Jasenovac cleaned the place up so everything would appear to be aboveboard. As soon as the commission left, however, everything returned to the way it was before.

Some camp commanders distinguished themselves for their cruelty. Ljubo Miloš, Ivica Matković, and Miroslav Filipović-Majstorović stand out among the executioners. Called Friar Satan, the latter served

79 Zemaljska Komisija Hrvatske za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača, 25.

The Massacres of Serbs, Jews, and Romani

as camp commander for about four months, starting in the fall of 1942. His evils were so great that, early in 1943, Archbishop Stepinac was forced to suspend him *a divinis*, and the Ustasha regime had to replace him with another executioner.

What happened in this camp—the slaughter of innocent people, and the unspeakable suffering inflicted on men, women, and children—forms the darkest chapter in the history of the exterminations perpetrated by the Ustasha throughout the country. In the national consciousness of Yugoslav Serbs and Jews, Jasenovac was the symbol of the annihilation policy applied to them by the Independent State of Croatia during the four years of its existence. It should be pointed out that most Croats not only did not take part in the crimes committed by the Ustasha, but also were frequently victims themselves.

Survival Problems for the Independent State

THE YUGOSLAV NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENT AND THE CHETNIKS

In August 1941, the 2nd Army occupied the demilitarized territories of Dalmatia and Herzegovina, as well as Bosnian Krajina and Lika—areas entirely within the boundaries of the Croatian state. While the Italian initiative could not be considered hostile, for it was dictated by contingent concerns of public order, nevertheless it contributed to casting further shadows on the *poglavnik*'s image in the eyes of Croats, precisely at a time when threats were arising against the integrity of the state.

Hotbeds of armed resistance had started smoldering in Dalmatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina as early as the summer of 1941. Hundreds of citizens forced to flee from their homes to avoid deportation or death at the hands of the regime flowed into these centers as well. Resistance groups were organized by the Yugoslav Communist Party (Komunistička Partija Jugoslavije). In the years immediately preceding the war, the party had managed "to turn into a united and disciplined organization," formed by militants accustomed to conducting their business clandestinely, many of whom had experienced jail, and been tempered by taking part in the Spanish Civil War. The turning point had been reached in 1935, when Moscow, fearing the rise of Nazi Germany, had given European communist parties the order to form an alliance with bourgeois and socialist forces open to collaboration. Thus, "the idea of a future state set up as a confederation of nations with a Yu-

goslav Communist Party likewise divided into national sections” was born in Yugoslavia. “The second part of this plan had been partially executed in May and August 1937,” when two communist parties were founded in Slovenia and in Croatia, respectively (Komunistička Partija Slovenije, and Komunistička Partija Hrvatske). Two years later, the forty-nine-year-old Josip Broz, known as Tito, was nominated to be secretary-general of the Yugoslav party with Moscow’s endorsement. Tito managed to transform the party’s organizational structure radically, impressing “the stamp of his strong personality” upon it.¹

The setting up of territorial units, locally rooted and adequately compartmented, each one enjoying operational autonomy, increased the dynamism and efficiency of the communist ranks. Thus, when word came that German troops had started invading the Soviet Union, on 22 June 1941, Tito launched a general mobilization of all Yugoslav peoples against Nazi fascist forces. On 4 July, during a Politburo meeting, the birth of a united partisan command was decided. A few months later, on 26 September, this was called Supreme Command of the Partisan Detachments for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia. In Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Slovenia, and Croatia, numerous brigades were formed and placed under the leadership of political commanders and commissioners, whereas in cities basic directives were taken up by *skojevci*, young members of the party, who—by carrying out terrorist attacks against Italians, Ustashes, and Germans—set an example and spread their will to fight to others.

The consensus enjoyed by partisans may be attributed to Tito’s ability to create a broad antifascist front, which reached far beyond communist forces, and united diverse political formations funneling them into the resistance movement. The Communist Party could count on a solid structure in Croatia, whose 4,500 members made the local organization the strongest among those belonging to the Yugoslav Communist Party (comprising 12,000 adherents in all).

1 Pirjevec, *Il giorno di San Vito*, 153 and 155.

Shortly after the invasion of the Italian and German troops, a part of Yugoslavia's royal army went into hiding in Serbia, coalescing around Draža Mihailović, a Serbian high officer who managed to escape capture, and taking the name of Chetniks (as Serbian rebels under Turkish rule had been called). "Thus was born a violent and savage movement, greatly motivated by loyalty to its tradition, dynasty, and ancient myths," which was constantly in touch with the Yugoslav government and king in exile, and which "would inform the next four years of Yugoslav history."² Chetnik groups formed in Serbia, Montenegro, and even in Croatia, where they took in thousands of Serbs attempting to escape slaughter at the hands of the Ustasha.

Unlike Tito's partisan forces, Mihailović's Chetniks aimed to restrict military conflict with the Germans as much as possible, in part to spare civilians the effects of German retaliation, and wait for a better time. The collaboration between partisans and Chetniks was limited, both because of the huge divide between the two movements and because of the abysmal personal relations between Tito and Mihailović. While partisans embodied all Yugoslav nationalities, received their orders from Moscow, and envisaged a communist social revolution as the outcome of their liberation efforts, the Chetnik movement was almost exclusively made up of Serbs, ideologically anticommunist, and not opposed to striking local agreements with occupation forces. At least in this early phase, Chetniks' attitude toward the Italian army was well captured by the following motto: "Do not attack us, for we do not attack you, and we will not, so long as you do not stand in the way of our plan."³

Setting out on an adventurous journey from Belgrade, Tito reached the partisans in September 1941. From that time on, he took control of the logistics of military operations as well. One of his first moves was to establish contact with Mihailović, in an attempt to coordinate

² Ibid., 153.

³ Bilandžić, *Hrvatska moderna povijest*, 130.

common guerrilla actions. The two leaders met first in mid-September and then a second time on 27 October in the village of Brjici. Steadfast in their opposite ideologies, their opinions were at odds even when it came to their military plans. The Chetnik commander's strategy was to sit on the fence. He believed the time had not come yet to make a massive attack on the Nazis, and trusted in the help of the British. He aimed to maintain control over a part of the territory until Axis troops were defeated, and King Peter could repatriate from Great Britain. From his point of view, communists posed as much of a threat to the royal crown as the invaders. There was little room for an understanding, therefore. What's more, an agreement entailing an exchange of weapons and logistical material was soon disregarded when the Chetniks made a sudden attack on Užice, where Tito and the partisan army had set up a weapons factory. The attack was warded off, but the attempt permanently barred the road to any kind of collaboration between the two armies.

The two resistance movements' success may be explained in the light of the Axis campaign, and the ways in which the latter was conducted. Indeed, Hitler demanded military operations in Greece and Yugoslavia be brought to an end as quickly as possible, so that most of his troops could be sent east to start the invasion of the Soviet Union. Under constant pressure from Berlin, the generals of the Wehrmacht did not have the time to comb all the land in search of hiding places, weapon deposits, resistance strongholds, and so on.⁴ They contented themselves with occupying the most important centers, and ensuring the safety of road and rail transit, at the same time leaving Mihailović's Chetniks and Tito's partisans free to settle in more remote inland areas, often hard to access and mountainous.

4 Hagen, *La guerra delle spie*, 151.

CONFLICTS BETWEEN ITALY
AND THE INDEPENDENT STATE OF CROATIA

Historians who have studied the vicissitudes of the Independent State of Croatia have been almost unanimous in ascribing the responsibility for the political, social, and economic crisis that befell the country within months of its proclaiming independence to Pavelić and the Ustasha government. Only in recent years have some Croatian scholars tried to call this theory into question, reconsidering the extent to which Pavelić and the Ustasha may be considered responsible, and highlighting the weight of Italian occupation as a decisive factor in determining the economic crisis of the Croatian state. Although some of these studies are clearly revisionist in nature, they do pose an inescapable question.⁵ While it is true that the massacres of Serbs, Jews, Romani, and antifascist Croats produced a social fracture that could not be healed, it is also worth considering whether—and if so, in which ways—the Pacts of Rome and the Italian and German initiatives that followed were suited to create a stable order in Dalmatia and Croatia.

On 21 April 1941, in the course of the meeting in Vienna that decided the fate of the Balkans, Ciano and Ribbentrop came to an understanding. In brief, political influence over the region would go to Italy, and economic influence to Germany. This compromise respected Italy's aspirations to transform the Balkans, from Croatia to Greece, into an area over which it could assert its political primacy, while giving Germany the right to exploit the region's natural resources and economic activities. After occupying the main mining areas, viewed as strategically important for the war, the Germans invested private capital in banking, industry, commerce, and insurance, while the Todt Organization monopolized public work establishing offices in many cities.

5 For example, see Matković, *Povijest Nezavisne Države Hrvatske*, and the oft-cited Kisić-Kolanović, *PDH i Italija*.

German initiatives—while consistent with the framework of the agreement made in Vienna—were seen as threats by Rome. Following a mission in Croatia and three meetings with Pavelić, Donato Menichella, the director of the IRI, concluded that Italy lacked the economic strength to penetrate Croatia, because neither its currency nor its products could compete with Germany's. The only viable path, he believed, was to instate a customs and monetary union: this would give Italy a definite edge over its competitors, which it would be difficult for any country to overtake. Hence, he urged Mussolini to force Pavelić to sign a customs and monetary union agreement as soon as possible, exerting great political pressure if necessary, and without delegating the matter to the Economic Commission.⁶ Indeed, with the onset of the war, the Italian economy had fallen into a slump: expanding the market by including Croatia might give it a strong push, turning the unfavorable economy around. Yet the Croatian government opposed this solution. As a result, the customs and monetary union never came to be, and the two countries inevitably took the route of bilateral agreements.

On the strength of these agreements, wood became the single greatest item in the economic relations between the two countries. But when Croatia realized the contracts involved disadvantageous conditions for itself, and deprived the independent state of the wood required to satisfy domestic demand, Pavelić's government attempted to renegotiate them, but to no avail.⁷ Wood, which accounted for 60 percent of all Croatian exports before the war, had in fact become scarce because forests were being used as hiding places by partisans, and few mills were still running. To supply cities, the Croatian government was forced to buy wood in territories occupied by partisans, at a cost of 100 kune per cubic meter, increased to 600 kune in the course of 1943.⁸

6 DDI, 9th series, vol. 7, doc. 131, 123–25.

7 One of the conditions listed in the agreements was the right of Italian forestry authorities to choose the trees to be felled, and discretionary use of local labor.

8 AUSSME, Fondo FF.AA., General Pieche's report from Croatia dated 26 June 1943, 3.

One of Mussolini's first decisions was to forbid the Independent State of Croatia from maritime activity. He feared such activity might lead to the establishment of a rival navy in the Adriatic. Dalmatia, whose road system was both insufficiently developed and antiquated, relied on its "Adriatic waterways" and the maritime exchanges the latter made possible for survival. At the time of the invasion, however, the entire civil and military fleet present in the region's ports had been sequestered by Italy. Croats later requested that a part of the ships be returned to them. The Italian authorities rejected this demand, claiming that the fleet was part of the war booty. After dismissing Croatian sailors, the command of the 2nd Army placed these ships under the Italian flag, and used them to carry troops and equipment along the coast. No better fate awaited the fishing fleet. For the most part, boats used for fishing were seized or sunk in the course of the war operations, or hidden by their owners. As a result, the quantity of fish caught declined drastically. In addition to causing serious harm to the local economy, this deprived people living along the coast of one of their main sources of food.

Croatia's failure to accept a customs and monetary union became a weapon of blackmail, used by Italy to exert pressure on the other side in every negotiation. When food shortages, the increase in prices, and the collapse of industrial production caused the population's living conditions to deteriorate, Count Volpi told Minister Toth that Croatia had brought this dire situation on itself, by rejecting the customs union.⁹ The Croatian ministers were often forced to accept the conditions laid down by Count Volpi, even because of Pavelić's utter disinterest in economic matters. Differences often proved irreconcilable, and led to unilateral initiatives.

Mutual distrust and suspicion gave rise to a crossfire of accusations. On more than one occasion, Pavelić charged the Italian army with shady dealings and currency speculation. General Piéche, in turn, believed the Ustasha movement was made up of "morally tainted" ele-

9 Kisić-Kolanović, *Mladen Lorković*, 146.

ments. He further accused Minister of Finance Košak and Minister of Foreign Affairs Lorković of contraband trade on a large scale, and of transferring conspicuous sums of money to Switzerland.¹⁰

The commercial agreements reached in June 1941 were renewed three more times—in Venice that same year in September, in Rome in January 1942, and again in Venice the following August. But chaos marred economic relations between the two countries as early as the end of 1941. Both parties failed to comply with the provisions of the agreements, effectively making all subsequent extensions void.

The agreement reached in October 1941 on the funding of the military occupation—entailing monetary compensation for Italy, supply to the armed forces by the Croatian state, and the removal of the customs border between the independent state and annexed Dalmatia (which, as a result, would no longer have any borders, either with Italy or with Croatia)—became another reason for conflict. Under the supervision of Croatian personnel, delegated by the government of Zagreb to oversee that supplies sent to Italian Dalmatia were not diverted elsewhere, 350 metric tons of meat for the provisioning of 200,000 Italian soldiers made it to destination in January 1942; the supply of meat increased to 650 metric tons by the following March.

Sending these foodstuffs to the Italian army took a toll on the civilian population, by causing food shortages and a spike in prices in the rest of Croatia.¹¹ In May 1942, the government of Zagreb asked Italy for permission to decrease its contribution to the 2nd Army, and told Berlin that, because of “the excessive demands of the Italians,” Croatia was unable to fulfill its economic commitments to Germany.¹² Starting in the summer of 1942, the dearth of food products throughout the independent state, particularly in Croatian Dalmatia, reached alarming proportions.

¹⁰ AUSSME, Fondo FF.AA., General Pieche's report from Croatia dated 4 May 1943, 5.

¹¹ Ibid., General Pieche's report from Croatia dated 26 June 1943, 2.

¹² By April 1942, the Croatian state had paid 1,500 million kune to Italy for the 2nd Army (Talpo, *Dalmazia*, vol. 2, 403).

While it was true that the significant amounts of grain, meat, and animal fats allocated to the 2nd Army put a further strain on a country that produced foodstuffs in quantities barely sufficient for its domestic needs, the reasons for the widespread famine lay elsewhere as well. As a result of the war, of the regime's persecutions, and of the partisan revolt, the lands used for farming had decreased in area: in 1942, they were 45 percent smaller than the year before, and in 1943 they shrunk further. The Ustashas did not grasp the situation's political consequences. Early in 1942, the former minister of commerce, Marijan Šimić, alerted Pavelić, telling him that the famine would undermine the country's social foundation. Out of touch with reality as he often was, the *poglavnik* answered: "You're exaggerating. We have all sorts of goods."¹³

The food shortages and widespread hunger that followed constituted a powerful weapon of propaganda in the hands of the Yugoslav Liberation Army. In Dalmatia, partisans helped the civilian population, and shared their limited resources with it. By doing so, they acquired prestige and support, a circumstance that would prove decisive in the near future.

The worsening of relations between Italy and Croatia played a key role in the postponement of the dynastic matter. According to the Pacts of Rome, the Duke of Spoleto, Aimone of Aosta, was to bear the crown of Croatia. Well aware that a monarchy wanting in ethnic ties and dynastic traditions was likely to be unpopular and therefore overthrown, Aimone of Aosta called for an official pronouncement from the parliament of Zagreb (Sabor) before taking the crown. He thought the parliamentary vote would show just how broad the consensus about the Italian dynasty was among Croats, dispelling the impression that his ascension to the throne had been imposed from above as a result of an agreement.¹⁴ However, the Sabor did not assemble for many months, and the matter was shelved for the whole summer of 1941. Evidently,

¹³ Kisić-Kolanović, *NDH i Italija*, 151.

¹⁴ DDI, 9th series, vol. 7, doc. 305, 290–94.

Croats were in no hurry to welcome the new sovereign, nor was the climate conducive to addressing dynastic questions. The contentions between Italy and the Croatian state concerned far more relevant issues, as the two countries continued to accuse each other of violating several provisions of the Pacts of Rome. At the end of 1941, it was Mussolini who put an end to the matter, instructing Casertano to forget about “the monarchic question, at least until the war over.”¹⁵ From that moment on, the Italian sovereign and his Croatian kingdom were never mentioned again, if not in passing.

THE SOCIAL FRACTURE AND OPPOSITION TO THE REGIME IN CROATIA

In the course of 1942, the Italian foreign affairs minister charged General Giuseppe Piéche of the Carabinieri—the head of military counterespionage section while Pavelić was spending time in Italy—with the task of going on a mission in the Balkans, a region of great interest to Italy. Piéche set up his headquarters in Opatija (Abbazia), availing himself of a dense network of informants and contacts spread out in all of the area’s towns and villages. In his reports, the general described the Ustasha regime as “deeply loathed, isolated, and lacking all prestige,” to the point that “only a 10 percent minority, made up of party members and of people who, for business reasons, live on its periphery,” remained favorable to the movement.¹⁶

The top echelons of the Peasant Party maintained a cold detachment toward the independent state, considered neither legal nor legitimate.¹⁷ Maček and his closest collaborators placed their trust in the Allies, whom they believed would arrive in the Balkans turning the course of the war around. They had therefore been biding their time. This attitude proved counterproductive in the long run, for it caused

¹⁵ DDI, 9th series, vol. 8, doc. 221, 248.

¹⁶ AUSSME, Fondo FF.AA., General Pieche’s report from Croatia dated 18 January 1943, 1.

¹⁷ Bilandžić, *Hrvatska moderna povijest*, 172.

the party to break into three factions. The left wing favored greater activism in the struggle against the Ustasha regime and the Nazi fascists, and finally merged with the National Liberation Front; the numerically smaller right wing offered its support to Pavelić's government, while the rest of the party adhered to Maček's positions.¹⁸

Some Croatian intellectuals constituted an opposition toward which the regime was ruthless. The novelist August Cesarec, who wrote dozens of books and translated the works of Zola and Gorky, was shot dead in a woodland near Zagreb; one of Croatia's best writers, Mihovil Pavlek-Miškina, was deported to Jasenovac and killed there in July 1942; Jovan Kršić, a Bosnian writer and the founder of the most important Yugoslav literary magazine, *Pregled*, was called on to swear allegiance to the Ustasha regime in his capacity as university professor, refused, and was stabbed to death on the outskirts of Sarajevo. Others demonstrated their opposition in a different way: Antun Barac, for example, claimed the "right to silence," saying "there are times in history when writing can appear a senseless occupation, almost unworthy of a serious man."¹⁹

The Yugoslav National Liberation Army had an essentially military role in the struggle against the Ustasha in Croatia. Opposition to the regime took on several forms, however, including human solidarity and support to the victims. Confronted with the savage and targeted cruelty of the massacres, a group of volunteers of the Red Cross in Zagreb, led by Diana Budisavljević, at risk of their lives, saved hundreds of children, most of them Serbian children orphaned after their parents had been killed, protecting them from certain death in the extermination camps of Stara Gradiška, Jablanak, and Mlaka, and getting them adopted by bourgeois families in the Croatian capital.²⁰

18 The Peasant Party's right wing included Janko Tortić, Lovro Sušić, Dragutin Toth, and Josip Berković; in the spring of 1941, they had openly supported Pavelić as he took power, and the latter had rewarded them by appointing them as his ministers (Sušić and Toth), and ambassadors (Tortić and Berković).

19 In Katičić and Novak, *Due mila anni di cultura scritta in Croazia*, 172.

20 Bulajić, *Jasenovac*, 24.

A part of the Catholic clergy also tried to alleviate the suffering of those most exposed to the fury of the Ustasha, organizing relief efforts, offering refuge to Serbs and Jews, preaching peace, and keeping in touch with groups and men of diverse political persuasions—including, through his confessors, Maček himself.²¹ Some prelates challenged the regime by signing a document condemning the destruction of Orthodox Christian churches, the closing of monasteries, and the deportation and killing of Orthodox monks. In order to avoid involvement in the practice of forced conversions, others ended up joining the partisans. This was the case of the theologian and author Svetozar Ritig, the parish priest of the church of Saint Mark in Zagreb. Once arrested, the clergymen who fought alongside partisans were executed by the Ustasha.

The crisis of the independent state was also the result of the rivalry between the various factions present in the Ustasha hierarchy. Historiography has unanimously identified a pro-Italian camp, led by Pavelić, and a pro-German camp, represented by Slavko Kvaternik and Mladen Lorković. This interpretation is true enough, though the Ustasha ruling class maintained a certain unity until the end of 1941, and gave the impression of expressing a collective will. It was early in 1942 that Kvaternik and Lorković started increasingly relying on the German representatives in Zagreb, Ambassador Siegfried Kasche and the military attaché Edmund Glaise von Horstenau, whom they used as leverage to contain Italy's pressing economic requests. However, differences of opinion and antipathy tainted the personal relationship between Kvaternik and Lorković, who therefore never succeeded in partnering up against the *poglavnik's* chosen course.

Mile Budak, whose life differed significantly from that of the other hierarchs, was another prominent figure of the regime. A writer and novelist, Budak authored *Ognjište* (The hearth), a long novel of rural life enjoying cult status in Croatian nationalist circles. His neoconser-

21 DDI, 9th series, vol. 9, doc. 376, 369.

vatism was tied up with a romantic view of life, in which obedience to one's grandfather—submission to family authority in general—lay at the heart of human relations. Upon replacing Mladen Lorković at the head of foreign affairs, Mile Budak never really warmed up to Italy, though he did not openly call Pavelić's decisions into question either. In his turn, the *poglavnik* did not recognize any particular talent in Budak, or hold him in high esteem. In fact, Pavelić was fond of saying that politicians and diplomats considered Budak a good writer, while writers considered him a good politician.²² After all, the intellectual component always remained relegated to the margins. The most representative figures—including the three young editors of the magazine *Spremnost* (Readiness), Ivo Bogdan, Aleksandar Seitz, and Tijas Mortigjija, who drew analogies between what had happened in Croatia on 10 April and the March on Rome—failed to merge the Ustaša movement with more moderate nationalist groups. It was precisely Mortigjija who invented the expression "genetic dualism"²³ to describe the wide gulf between Croatia's two nationalist factions, that is, traditional nationalism and Ustashism, favoring a totalitarian regime akin to Nazi fascism. The latter had overcome the former, creating a fracture in Croatian society that could not be healed.

THE AGREEMENT WITH THE CHETNIKS AND ITALIAN CRIMES

In the spring of 1942, the fate of the war was still uncertain. In Africa, the forces of the Axis led by Rommel had advanced to the east, settling near the Egyptian border, not far from Alexandria and the Suez Canal. On the Russian Front, the decisive assault on Moscow and Stalingrad was scheduled to take place that summer. Meanwhile, the Nazis peddled information on the imminent fall of the Soviet Union and its allies on a daily basis. The war was now on a global scale, involved ci-

²² Kisić-Kolanović, *NDH i Italija*, 350.

²³ *Ibid.*, 69.

vilians, and mobilized all resources—economic, ideological, and psychological, as well as military.

The annexation of Dalmatia and the occupation of the second and third zones caused political and military problems for Italy. While issues of a political nature had prevailed until the end of 1941, matters of war presented themselves as well starting in January 1942.

To solve both kinds of problems—that is, political and military problems—Italian authorities sought the support of the Chetniks. In a report on the situation in Dalmatia, the diplomat Roberto Ducci wrote: “Our objective must be to avoid at all costs the creation of a united front against us, made up of all the citizens of former Yugoslavia. The need is clear for us to carry out nimble political footwork, on site, and be ruthless, not letting any of the opportunities still available to us go to waste because of instinctive antipathy or preconceptions; we need to carry out political action capable of pitting ethnic and political groups against one another, rekindle mutual hate and create new occasions for its development.”²⁴ It is plain that the agreements reached with the Chetnik leaders were expedient to put political pressure on the government of Zagreb, and discourage any pro-Croatian irredentist ambitions on the part of Dalmatia. Bearing in mind that Chetniks were deeply anticommunist, and that Italy feared that the communist movement might spread to the Balkans, the reasons for the Italian option are further clarified.

In January 1942, General Mario Roatta replaced Vittorio Ambrosio at the helm of the 2nd Army, while the latter replaced the former as the chief of staff. Before leaving the Balkans, Ambrosio claimed the “ultimate problem, and most convenient course for us, was to reduce opponents as much as possible.”²⁵ Roatta came into a difficult situation, but

²⁴ Talpo, *Dalmazia*, vol. 3, 499. An important Yugoslav historian, Branko Petranović, has claimed that the Italian policies toward Serbs were not dictated by humanitarian or moral reasons, and that Italy saw Chetniks as an auxiliary force in the antipartisan struggle. Cf. Petranović, *Srbija u Drugom svetskom ratu*, 127–28; and by the same author, *Revolucija i kontrarevolucija u Jugoslaviji*, 494.

²⁵ Talpo, *Dalmazia*, vol. 2, 563.

he knew the Balkans well and was more than a little familiar with antiguerrilla tactics. Thus, he chose to take Ducci and Ambrosio's ideas to the extreme, and utilize the Chetniks for military purposes in an antipartisan capacity.

As a result, the 2nd Army set up and coordinated groups of Chetniks under the command of Ilija Trifunović-Brčanin, Dobroslav Jevđević, and Momčilo Đujić in Lika, in the territory of Knin, and in Herzegovina. Chetnik support made up for the military deficiency of the 2nd Army. The men and means the Italian army could rely on were scarce in relation to the vastness of the area to be watched over. Italian garrisons often amounted to small, isolated strongholds amid ravines and mountains.

In truth, Pavelić's regime had substantial military resources at its disposal, which it could have deployed to aid the 2nd Army in fighting against partisans. In 1942, the Croatian army (Domobranstvo) was made up of about 110,000 soldiers, and the Ustasha militia could count on about 40,000 men (mostly volunteers), totaling about 150,000 fighters. Three additional legion divisions—the 369th Vražja, the 373rd Tigar, and the 392nd Plava—operated under the Wehrmacht. Meanwhile, at the end of 1942, Tito's army comprised about 25,000 fighters in Croatia. Hence, the ratio of military forces operating under the command of the independent state to those operating under the partisans was 6 to 1.²⁶ Still, as a result of deficiencies in logistics, training, and equipment, as well as a lack of real motivation, the part played by the Croatian military was actually very modest.

On 2 March, in Opatija (Abbazia), Roatta met with some Wehrmacht generals and with the Croatian general Vladimir Laxa to coordinate a military campaign against the Yugoslav National Liberation Army dubbed Operation Trio. The Italians still had a very poor understanding of who their enemy was. At the time, Luca Pietromarchi noted in his journal that one of the Montenegrin rebels "was a certain

26 Bilandžić, *Hrvatska moderna povijest*, 141.

Tito, a Jew..."²⁷ Yet this was not the most serious problem undermining the campaign's success. Operation Trio failed as a result of poor coordination, excessive personalization, and mutual suspicions. Usually, a few days after the roundups were over, partisans reoccupied abandoned territories and resumed damaging communication routes.

In the course of the summer, Tito concentrated his divisions in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where, following harsh clashes with the Axis forces, partisans were able to conquer a territory the size of Belgium, and wreck 1,700 kilometers of railroad—half of the whole Croatian network. National liberation efforts under the guidance of the Communist Party gradually took on the form of a social revolution. Some proletarian divisions were established, and conflicts with the rich bourgeoisie became more prominent in liberated territories. This turn of events did not please Moscow in the least. The alliance with Great Britain was of the utmost importance for the Soviet Union, and—given that the exiled king was in London—Stalin would have preferred for partisans and Mihailović's monarchic troops to collaborate. The Leninist overtones assumed by the national liberation in Yugoslavia thus became a reason for concern for the Soviets. On 5 March 1942, they wrote and asked Tito "why the partisan movement had acquired such a prominent communist quality [and whether it had been] necessary to set up proletarian brigades."²⁸

In his dispatches from Zagreb, Casertano described a dramatic situation. The Croatian capital itself was being threatened both from the south and from the north, while the partisan movement had in the meantime become a mass movement.²⁹ In Dalmatia and in the province of Ljubljana, acts of sabotage and attacks against administrative offices and Italian civilian and military staff members became a daily affair. Italy's response was immediate and indiscriminate. Private residences were burned down, people were executed and deported, and

²⁷ Burgwyn, *L'impero sull'Adriatico*, 228.

²⁸ Bilandžić, *Hrvatska moderna povijest*, 139.

²⁹ DDI, 9th series, vol. 9, doc. 376, 371.

so forth. Governor Bastianini decreed the death penalty for membership in communist and other subversive organizations, civil disobedience, and other ill-defined abuses.³⁰ Unprepared to face an enemy that did not show up on the open field but preferred to strike out suddenly laying ambushes—an enemy more familiar with the land and able to vanish into thin air blending in with the civilian population—Italian soldiers intensified repression. Roundups became increasingly frequent, stricter measures were enforced, and all manners of abuse toward civilians took place.³¹ In his report to Governor Bastianini, Paolo Zerbino, the prefect of Split, wrote that 1,796 people had been deported from his province to Italy between 1 November 1941 and 15 May 1942, while an additional 1,273 people had been expelled and transferred to the Independent State of Croatia.³² According to the latter's official estimates, the number of Croats expelled from Italian Dalmatia in that period totaled 17,000.

In June, Roatta signed an agreement made with Pavelić whereby the Italian troops would pull out of the second and third zones, which would be handed over to the independent state. The agreement further provided that Croats keep commitments already in effect, and abstain from any reprisals against Serbs. Italy intended for this handover to make Croats accountable for the problems of public order in those regions, as well as for the fight against partisans. In fact, it did not relieve the Italian army of its efforts against Tito's men, while putting an end to Italian ambitions of ever turning Croatia into a protectorate.³³

In April, Roatta had issued "Circular 3 C," with measures to oppose the partisan guerrilla. The document highlighted the need for soldiers to acquire the appropriate warlike mentality and repress their qualities as "good Italians," that is, excessive sentimentality, understanding for the enemy, and cordial relations with the civilian population. Roatta

30 Burgwyn, *L'impero sull'Adriatico*, 157.

31 Davide Rodogno, "Italian Soldiers in the Balkans," 129.

32 Dizdar, "Italian Policies toward Croats in Occupied Territories during the Second World War," 192.

33 Burgwyn, *L'impero sull'Adriatico*, 209.

believed the enemy was to be fought with the greatest resolve and in the most vigorous way possible, following not the principle of “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,” but that of “a head for a tooth.”³⁴ It was an immunity that allowed troop commanders to commit excesses and violence with their superiors’ approval. Over the course of the year, these norms became increasingly brutal. In July, General Robotti, who had succeeded Roatta at the head of the 2nd Army, ordered that anyone responsible for acts of hostility toward the Italian authorities, anyone in possession of weapons, ammunition, and explosives, and anyone found bearing fake passports, identity cards, or permits be executed: “I will not allow people guilty of the crimes mentioned above to be referred to tribunals or imprisoned; they must be suppressed,” he wrote to his subalterns rather brusquely.³⁵

On 5 August 1942, General Ruggero issued a report on a roundup conducted by his unit, informing the general command that sixty-three residents of the village of Rakitnica suspected of aiding and abetting partisans had been arrested, a camp set up by the rebels had been destroyed, five barracks had been burned down, and a communist bandit had been executed. At the bottom of the written telephone message, General Robotti himself had noted the following words by hand: “Must clarify treatment of suspects. Not to have found a way to make an example of at least one of the sixty-three suspects seems to me like an excess [of leniency]. What do the norms listed in 3 C and subsequent circulars say? In brief, executions are being carried out too sparingly!”³⁶

The command of the 2nd Army, dubbed “Supersloda” (Supreme Command Slovenia–Dalmatia) in May 1942, received complaints from the Croatian government concerning the Italian divisions. These had been burning down and indiscriminately ransacking houses and villages, causing people to flee from the areas affected by the operations.

34 Archivio Fondazione Istituto per la Storia dell’Età contemporanea, Fondo Gasparotto, b. 10, f. 38, circular 3 C, 1 December 1942.

35 Ibid., Circular Robotti, 18 July 1942.

36 Ibid., Note by General Robotti, 5 August 1942.

Early in 1943, Minister Lorković sent functionaries to Herzegovina to document the destructions perpetrated by the Italian army, and Archbishop Stepinac inquired with the area's religious authorities about what had happened. Later, Stepinac too sent a protest to Casertano, which he supplemented with statements by the local parish priests.³⁷

Around the same time, the Italian army set up a prison camp on the island of Rab (Arbe), where thousands of civilians, mostly Slovenes and Croats, were interned. To force men who had gone into hiding and joined the partisan troops to return to their homes, their relatives—including women and children—were arrested and locked up in the camp. It is estimated that about 13,000 people were detained in the camp of Rab alone, but the whole Dalmatian coast and Istria were riddled with such camps: about 10,000 people were interned on the island of Molat (Melada); 3,000 in Bakar (Buccari); 2,500 in Zlarin (Slarino). According to some estimates, between June 1942 and June 1943, the number of those who were incarcerated in camps in the region exceeded 25,000.³⁸

In stark contrast to Slovenian and Croatian detainees, sometimes killed in retaliation for insurgencies in their respective homelands, Jews held on the island of Rab were shielded from Nazi and Ustasha cruelty for as long as Italy was still standing, and spared from the Holocaust.

At the end of the war, the names of 953 Italians, mostly belonging to the armed forces, were included in the list of war criminals prepared by the Central Registry of War Criminals and Security Suspects (CROWCASS), an organization set up to assist the United Nations War Crimes Commission.³⁹

37 AUSSME, Fondo Calderini, Lettera di Mons. Stepinac a Casertano, 27 March 1943.

38 Rodogno, *Il nuovo ordine mediterraneo*, 529–35.

39 Focardi and Klinkhammer, "La questione dei 'criminali di guerra' italiani e una Commissione di inchiesta dimenticata," 526.

THE HOLY SEE AND THE SITUATION IN CROATIA

On 1 March 1942, a group of Slovenian priests deported to Serbia addressed a memorandum to Monsignor Ujčić, which the bishop believed it was his duty to forward to the Secretariat of State. The memorandum pointed out that, in spite of the caution advised by bishops, forced conversions were still taking place without the slightest foundation of religious conviction, and that the responsibility for this lay with the Ustasha regime. The authors of this text further denounced the Holy See's silence in the face of these horrors with disarming clarity. Even worse, they claimed that the conversions—that is, the “Croatization” of Serbs—constituted a common goal for the Croatian episcopate and the Ustasha government.⁴⁰ Hence, it was figures of the Catholic clergy itself that exposed, in no roundabout way, the collusion and unity of intents between the Croatian Church and Pavelić's regime.

Although the Holy See has only published a selection—rife with deliberate omissions—of the diplomatic documents produced during the war on the “matter of conversions,” other sources have clarified that the attitudes held by the Vatican's higher echelons were varied. Early in March 1942, Rušinović met with Monsignor Montini—Secretary of State Cardinal Maglione's closest collaborator, with Monsignor Tardini—and was reproached by him: “What's happening in Croatia? Why such clamor [...] all over the world? Can all these crimes really have taken place? And is it true that prisoners are being mistreated?”⁴¹ To reassure Montini, Rušinović attributed all such charges to enemy propaganda, and said that a delegation of clergymen had visited the main concentration camps, and that it would be wise to ask this delegation for an assessment of the prisoners' treatment. On 6 February 1942, Stjepan Lacković and Giuseppe Masucci, secretaries to Archbishop Stepinac and Abbot Marcone, respectively, had in-

⁴⁰ Novak, *Magnum Crimen*, 785–87.

⁴¹ Falconi, *Il silenzio di Pio XII*, 396.

deed gone to Jasenovac. Informed of the inspection beforehand, the men in charge of the camp had arranged for everything to seem within the law, so that the visitors would be left with a positive impression. Finally, Monsignor Montini declared himself “satisfied” with the explanations provided by Rušinović, and “happy” to have been reassured by “a Catholic Croat.”⁴² Rušinović also met with Monsignor Tardini, who, in a conciliatory tone, laid out his perspective on the problem: the Croatian state was young, and it was not “surprising” that it had made “mistakes,” as any fledgling is prone to do. “It’s only human,” His Eminence replied. “This can be understood and justified. Yet enemies will do neither. In fact, they try to cause a stir even where [no mistakes] have been made. Hence, all the clamor that was raised concerning Croatia.”⁴³

Conversely, no fatherly compassion could be elicited from Monsignor Tisserant, the secretary of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, with whom Rušinović had three meetings in 1942, on 6 and 20 March, and on 27 May. At first, the French clergyman decried Franciscans’ atrocious behavior in Croatia and in Bosnia-Herzegovina, citing the case of Father Šimić of Knin, who had taken part in attacks against the Orthodox population.⁴⁴ Rušinović denied the Ustasha’s involvement in those acts of violence and in the destruction of Orthodox churches, reiterating that such information had been deftly circulated by Croatia’s enemies. He was unwavering even when Tisserant presented him with documents attesting to the violence perpetrated by the Ustasha against the Serbian population: “It’s all falsified, pure fabrication,” Rušinović said in the face of evidence.⁴⁵ Tisserant, annoyed by such attitude, complained about him with two Croatian priests: “Did the Croatian state not have another snotty-nosed diplomat more

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 433.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 382.

⁴⁵ Hrvatski Državni Arhiv (Croatian State Archive), Zagreb (henceforth HDA), Republički sekretarijat unutrašnjih poslova SRH, Služba državne sigurnosti (RSUP-SRH-SDS), 001.14, Hrvatska emigracija i kler, 10.

suited to be sent to the Vatican than Rušinović?”⁴⁶ Their final meeting was even more heated. Tisserant accused Croats of holding as many as 20,000 Serbs in a single concentration camp, and of having already killed many others. He dismissed Rušinović saying “it’s hard to see what Croats hold against Serbs, when they behave even worse.”⁴⁷ As far as may be gleaned from the documents, Cardinal Eugène Tisserant was the only one in the Vatican to voice, albeit in private form, indignation for all that was happening and compassion for the victims.

In the spring of 1942, the Holy See appointed Petar Čule and Josip Šimrak as bishops of Mostar and Križevci, respectively. In truth, the Vatican’s policy prescribed keeping all nominations on hold until after the conflict, but in those dioceses the situation was very delicate, and the Secretariat of State chose to confer full authority on the two prelates.⁴⁸ While the two bishops were not anti-Ustasha in their views, Pavelić opposed their appointment for reasons of principle—that is, because he had not been consulted in advance. He hoped that in exchange for his support he would be granted the *de jure* recognition he had been longing for. Yet the Vatican was resolute: through the pontifical legate Marcone, Rome threatened to excommunicate Pavelić if he did not accept the two appointments, and the *poglavnik* had no choice but to yield. This was the last matter Nikola Rušinović had to deal with as the Croatian representative in the Vatican. In the summer of 1942, he was replaced by Prince Ervien Karl Lobkowitz, assisted by Monsignor Draganović as his “counselor-priest.”

In the summer of 1942, Myron Taylor—the US president’s personal envoy to the pope—delivered a report to Secretary of State Maglione, and, through him, to Pius XII. According to this document, Jews of all ages and both sexes were being transferred by railroad from the ghetto in Warsaw to concentration camps where they were being killed, and

⁴⁶ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁷ Falconi, *Il silenzio di Pio XII*, 483.

⁴⁸ In Herzegovina, relations with Franciscans who openly supported the Ustasha movement was extremely problematic, and in the Greek-Catholic diocese of Križevci persecution against Serbs continued.

their corpses processed into fat and fertilizer. The “final solution” had started, and Jews were being deported from all Nazi-occupied European countries. The extremely comprehensive report was not the only source from which the pope and the Secretariat of State learned of the tragedy. In those same days, Count Malvezzi, an IRI executive who had just returned from a trip to Poland, spoke with Montini and described to him in brutally realistic terms the proportions of what was happening.⁴⁹ His firsthand account fully confirmed the dramatic reports already submitted to the Secretariat of State by Kasimir Papée, the Polish ambassador to the Holy See.

In the context of the “final solution,” on 24 July, Berlin and Zagreb made an agreement entailing the deportation to Germany of surviving Jews still present in the Independent State of Croatia. The next month, the Croatian government accepted to pay Germany 30 marks for each deported Jew, whose assets the former seized to offset this expense.⁵⁰

Myron Taylor and US Ambassador Harold Tittmann repeatedly asked the Vatican for a public condemnation by the pope of the atrocities Nazis committed against civilians in the occupied territories. But Pius XII chose to remain silent, and Secretary of State Maglione issued a brief statement, saying “the Holy See had received news concerning the harsh treatment [sic] of Jews. It had not however been able to verify the accuracy of all the news it had received. Still, the Holy See has not failed to intervene in favor of the Jews any time the opportunity to do so has presented itself.”⁵¹

While it was true that the Vatican had sometimes gone to great lengths to alleviate the suffering of Jews—particularly if they were Catholic converts, or married to Catholic women—it was not equally true that the Vatican had not been able to “verify the accuracy of all the news it had received.” In addition to the accounts mentioned above, a report from Zagreb by Abbot Marcone concerning his meeting with

⁴⁹ ADSS, vol. 8, 52.

⁵⁰ Burgwyn, *L'impero sull'Adriatico*, 239.

⁵¹ ADSS, vol. 8, doc. 496, 669.

the chief of the Croatian police, Dido Kvaternik, had reached the Secretariat of State at least two months before. Kvaternik had informed Marcone of the German government's demands that all Jews residing in the Croatian state be delivered to Germany within six months, and that "two million" Jews had recently been killed in Germany.⁵²

Despite Pius XII's silence, dozens of episodes attest to the efforts made by members of the Croatian Catholic Church in favor of the persecuted. Marcone himself tried to convince Pavelić and his ministers to change the measures against the Jews or, if that was not possible, at least to avoid the deportation of those who had been baptized or had a Catholic spouse. For their attempts in behalf of Jews, Stepinac and Marcone even received an official recognition from the rabbi of Zagreb, Miroslav Shalom Freiburger, later killed in Germany at the hands of the Nazis.⁵³ Yet Marcone's personal commitment to the cause of the persecuted cannot make up for his forgiving attitude toward Pavelić, whose real nature he never understood. The abbot was intimately persuaded of the *poglavnik*'s good faith, and took the Ustasha authorities' professed intentions at face value.⁵⁴ Indeed, the words he wrote in May 1943 are downright disconcerting: "The Croatian government never carried out a religious persecution against the schismatics. In fact, over the past year, the latter have been favored and helped by civil authorities. The Ministry of Cults employs a schismatic priest who attends to the interests of his Church [the Croatian Orthodox Church founded by Pavelić]."⁵⁵

Conversely, it is certain that, as the months passed, Stepinac's attitude toward Pavelić and the regime changed. As early as May 1941, the primate of Croatia wrote the internal affairs minister asking that the measures issued with regard to Jews and Serbs be enacted with

⁵² ADSS, vol. 8, doc. 431, 601.

⁵³ In August 1942, Freiburger thanked the pope "for the unbounded kindness shown by the representatives of the Holy See and the leaders of the Church toward our poor brothers" (ADSS, vol. 8, doc. 441, 611).

⁵⁴ HDA, RSUP-SRH-SDS, Hrvatska emigracija i kler, 19.

⁵⁵ ADSS, vol. 9, doc. 130, 220.

some measure of respect for the human person. On 21 July 1941, he addressed the *poglavnik* directly, urging him to ensure a more humane treatment of non-Aryans and Orthodox Serbs transferred to the concentration camps.⁵⁶ For Christmas, he asked for permission to aid and comfort the prisoners of Jasenovac and Lobor. In February 1942, following pleas by the bishop of Senj, he stepped in against the demolition of Orthodox churches. These are but a few of the many instances in which Stepinac intervened in the situation. During the first year of the regime, he probably believed that the men responsible for such atrocities were isolated groups of Ustasha who answered to no one and to nothing, except to their own thirst for cruelty. But upon realizing that most of his requests fell on deaf ears, and no real change in policy ever followed the formal reassurances he was given, he gradually became aware of Pavelić's true colors.

In March 1943, when the regime issued a decree prescribing that the few Jews married to Catholics sign up with the police, Stepinac protested openly. "No one gives the authorities the power to interfere with the family or with marriage [...] contracted according to the natural and sacred laws of God," he publicly declared. This pronouncement, though aimed at safeguarding only those Jews who were married to Catholics, firmly denounced the Ustasha racial policy at large. "The Catholic Church knows nothing of races born to rule and races doomed to slavery," Stepinac said. "The Catholic Church knows races and nations as creatures of God."⁵⁷ Following these remarks, Stepinac became so disliked in Ustasha circles that the mere mention of his name sent party leaders, including Pavelić, into a rage.

This conflict with the highest representative of the Croatian Church was another aspect of the regime's crisis, currently characterized by another element as well, namely, the clash among party leaders. At the end of 1942, Pavelić brought in a new cabinet, expelling Marshall

⁵⁶ Alexander, *The Triple Myth*, 71.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 97 and 99.

Kvaternik—disliked not only by Italians for his open pro-Germanism, but also by Germans, who considered him exceedingly prone to scheming—from the executive. Kvaternik, however, refused to resign from the government, and rumors were circulating to the effect that he was maneuvering to attempt a putsch. On 25 December, Pavelić summoned him and told him he was dismissed, on account of the fact that both allies, Germany and Italy, were opposed to him. When the *poglavnik* explicitly asked him to retire from politics, Kvaternik replied: “Why is it that foreigners are driving me out [of office]? Surely you must agree with them.” When Pavelić remained silent, Kvaternik continued: “You are leading Croatia and the Croatian people to ruin.”⁵⁸

58 Nada Kisic-Kolanovic, *NDH i Italija*, 316.

Crisis and the End of the Croatian State

THE WAR AT A TURNING POINT

Between the end of 1942 and the beginning of 1943, the path of the Second World War changed radically. On 4 November, the African dream Hitler and Mussolini had been nursing of arriving in Egypt and taking control of Middle Eastern oil wells came to an end in El-Alamein. After a months-long series of battles, the British army under General Montgomery crushed the German and Italian divisions. During the same period, the Battle of Stalingrad was taking place on the Russian Front. Deploying one million soldiers, 13,000 cannons, 900 tanks, and 1,100 airplanes, the Red Army surrounded Axis divisions, and annihilated them. The counteroffensive—which in two and a half years would bring the Soviets to Berlin—started at this time.

In Yugoslavia, too, the fate of military operations was about to be turned around, while the future political balance started coming into view. Tito deliberately sped the process up when, in November 1942, in Bihać, Bosnia-Herzegovina, he summoned the first session of the Antifašističko Vijeće Narodnog Olsobodenja Jugoslavije (Antifascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia, AVNOJ). Comprising several political forces, this board established itself as an organization for the national and political representation of the Yugoslav National Liberation Movement. Despite directives from Moscow forbidding the creation of political organisms concerning themselves with the future of the Yugoslav state, Tito and the fifty-two delegates gathered in assembly in Bihać were effectively parliamentary representatives of a new socialist Yugoslavia.

The antifascist council “became a mouthpiece for new ideas on the future of Yugoslavia, based on equality between its ethnic groups, social justice, and parity of the sexes (women had played an important role in the partisan movement), which had a great impact on the masses. It was an instrumental discourse communists used for their own purposes. Nonetheless, it was endowed with a strong messianic value, for it promised a social order radically different from the previous one.”¹

Confronted, on the one hand, with the military success of the Yugoslav National Liberation Army and, on the other, with the threat of an Anglo-American landing in the Balkans, for which partisans would act as a dangerous bridgehead, Axis commands decided to engage in a military effort to help the Independent State of Croatia regain control of the territory. The military operation called “Weiss” (White) was launched on 20 January 1943, deploying six German divisions and four Italian divisions, with additional help from Croatian units. The pressure exerted by the German troops forced the partisan army to flee Croatian Krajina, seeking refuge in the south. Once in Bosnia, however, the partisan army was met by the Italian troops, which, together with the Chetniks, tried to hold it in a grip. The military maneuver carried out by the Axis forces—known as the “Fourth Offensive” in Yugoslav historiography—achieved the goal of reducing the pressure of the partisans on the Independent State of Croatia, but it did not disband Tito’s army. The forced march to escape the offensive compelled partisans to travel for thousands of kilometers, taking the wounded along, while the poor hygiene of soldiers resulted in typhus epidemics, and further deaths. Nevertheless, amid great suffering—caused by the battles, lack of food, and disease—Tito managed to find refuge in south-eastern Bosnia.

Both in the course of the military maneuvers and for the control of the territory, the Italian commanders continued to rely on help from the Chetniks, though their deployment raised problems with Zagreb

1 Pirjevec, *Il giorno di San Vito*, 171.

and with Berlin alike. Pavelić denounced the many instances in which the Croatian population was experiencing violence, abuse, and rape at the hands of the Chetniks, whereas Hitler feared that if the Allies landed in the Balkans, the Chetniks would turn against the Axis. In February 1943, Ribbentrop started putting great pressure on Mussolini to end this dangerous alliance and proceed to disarm the Chetniks.

Between 15 May and 15 June, the Axis carried out a new military attack along the River Sutjeska, in southeastern Bosnia. The operation, Case Black (Fall Schwarz), went down in the history of the Yugoslav national liberation war as the “Fifth Enemy Offensive.” The Wehrmacht and the 2nd Army deployed about 120,000 men to tackle 20,000 partisan fighters, who once again succeeded in escaping the encirclement, though Tito himself was wounded during a bombing.

The matter of aid by the Allies became so prominent that it ended up weighing on the relations of strength between them, and indeed influencing the conflict’s development. In the West, Allied propaganda had elevated Draža Mihailović to one of the great myths of the Second World War, describing him as a legendary leader who, with few means and much courage, had been challenging Axis divisions. *Time* magazine had included him in the pantheon of the greatest Allied leaders, in a position higher than Soviet Marshal Timoshenko or Chiang Kai-shek.² Meanwhile, Radio Free Yugoslavia—the station broadcasting from Ufa, in the Soviet Union, controlled by the Comintern—had long been denouncing Mihailović’s and the Chetniks’ collaboration with the Axis. These charges had been received with some caution by the Foreign Office, yet the doubt that the partisan army was better organized and more effective in the war against Nazi fascist forces than the Chetniks could ever be started to catch on. When the British SOE (Special Operation Executive) intercepted a series of German reports that clearly revealed that the partisan resistance was deploying far more divisions than the Chetniks, the Allies’ attitude toward the partisans changed

² Bilandžić, *Hrvatska moderna povijest*, 158.

dramatically. What's more, in 1942, the Yugoslav government in exile in London had made a gross mistake telling Mihailović to avoid engaging in an open confrontation with the Nazis until the Allies landed in the Balkans. The dispatch containing this directive had fallen into the hands of the British government, and confirmed the feeling that the Chetniks and the government in exile were, at the very least, passive, if not inclined to collaborate with the Germans.³

For all these reasons, the British decided to send a mission to the partisan command. Captain William Deakin, together with a small following, arrived in Montenegro at the end of May 1943, precisely when the Yugoslav National Liberation Army was facing Case Black, perhaps the war's most demanding test. In his report, held in very high regard also because of his personal friendship with Churchill, Deakin drew attention to the fact that substantial help was required by the partisans, who were engaging dozens of thousands of Nazi soldiers and had very little strength left.⁴

A new mission led by Fitzroy Maclean reached the headquarters in mid-September. A rather pragmatic conservative, and a man of some experience in diplomatic service, Maclean quickly established an open and honest relationship with Tito. In a report sent to Cairo and to London in November, he even suggested suspending all help to the Chetniks and sending weapons and logistical material to the partisans only. It was thus that the young King Peter's fence-sitting, on the one hand, and Deakin's and Maclean's reports, on the other, influenced the British attitude, and gradually occasioned Allied support to Tito's forces. Anglo-Americans appreciated Tito's and the Yugoslav National Liberation Army's efforts and results, and promoted them to the rank of their allies in the Balkans.

³ Djilas, *The Contested Country*, 144–45.

⁴ William Deakin, who taught history at Wadham College (Oxford) both before and after the war, described the context and the events of the mission to Yugoslavia in his book *The Embattled Mountain*.

THE END OF ITALIAN HEGEMONY IN DALMATIA

Meeting with Mussolini in February 1943, Ambassador Casertano drew a pitiful picture of the two years of collaboration with the Independent State of Croatia: Pavelić's "police regime [...] had control over Zagreb and three or four other cities," but the rest of the country was "in the hands of the rebels, or occupied by Italians and Germans," and the northern regions of "Sirmium and Slavonia were up in arms in reaction to the persecutions carried out by the Ustasha." Pavelić and his government constantly disregarded the agreements made in May 1941, whereby Croatia was to be brought into "the sphere of the imperial community of Rome." And Italy—which Casertano felt had "vouched" for Croatia politically and militarily for two years—did not see "the primacy of its interests" in the area acknowledged.⁵ The experiment of creating the independent state had failed, and on this point Casertano, Mussolini, and Bastianini bitterly agreed.

What finally dispelled any illusions Italy might have been entertaining about the independent state was the Croatian army's passing under the Wehrmacht's command. Pavelić had asked Berlin for weapons and supplies. Ribbentrop had accepted, provided the Croatian army pass under German control. Necessity bred invention, and Pavelić yielded to this request, presented to the public as an advantageous merging of the two armies.⁶ Henceforth, Germans assumed greater responsibilities and tasks in Croatia. The Wehrmacht deployed new troops in defense of Zagreb and the country's most important cities. Further, it took upon itself the direct control of the police force, telegraph and postal services, the railroad, and public order, effectively carrying everything out without even consulting Croatian or Italian authorities. A new season of suffering started for those Jews who had avoided Ustasha deportation until then.⁷ Between the end of 1942 and the first months

5 DDI, 9th series, vol. 10, doc. 23, 25.

6 Kisić-Kolanović, *NDH i Italija*, 336.

7 After the 1942 Wannsee Conference, in which the Nazis decided on the "final solution" of the "Jewish question," satellite states were forced to transfer all Jews into the concentration camps.

of 1943, roundups started taking place again throughout the Independent State of Croatia, and in Zagreb alone between 4 and 6 May 1943 about 600 Jews were arrested, most of them elderly, women, and children, who were then sent to Germany and Poland.⁸

Though disappointed and annoyed, Mussolini believed not all was lost. By way of Minister Casertano, he asked Pavelić to desist from the conflict with the Serbs, “not only for reasons of humanity,” but also because it was “a mistake, a serious mistake” for Croatia’s survival. Mussolini further insisted that Pavelić “stop his country’s irredentism” and put an end to his “political wavering” between Italy and Germany. Italy still had resources “in terms of men and means,” and would “fight the war to its end.”⁹ Finally, the Duce accepted the *poglavnik*’s request for the two of them to meet privately. The appointment was postponed repeatedly until the summer, when Mussolini set the date for 19 July. Yet the seriousness of the military situation and the imminence of the Grand Council made it necessary for this date to be suspended as well. Finally, the two never met.

The diplomatic skirmishes between Italy and Croatia gave way to personal score settling in the course of 1943. Casertano had convinced himself that Minister Lorković was very close to the German ambassador in Zagreb, Kasche, and to the military plenipotentiary Glaise von Horstenau, and therefore that his position at the head of foreign affairs was “very damaging” for Italy.¹⁰ In truth, Casertano had never had a good rapport with Lorković, and finally, at the end of March, he asked Pavelić for the Croatian minister’s head. Lorković resigned the following month, but there was serious fallout. Perić, the Croatian ambassador in Rome, was forced to step down from his post for uselessly trying to defend Lorković and asking for Casertano’s resignation instead. The latter left Zagreb in April, transferring to Budapest. The three men’s exit from the scene did not improve relations between Italy and Croatia, however.

8 AUSSME, Fondo FF.AA., General Picche’s report from Croatia, 4 May 1943, 5.

9 Talpo, *Dalmazia*, vol. 3, 241.

10 DDI, 9th series, vol. 10, doc. 142, 179–80.

In the days immediately following 25 July, Petrucci—the new Italian ambassador in Zagreb—had to deal with the fall of Fascism and its unexpected developments. In former Yugoslav territories, all factions mobilized. There was a change in the attitude of Chetniks, who started engaging in open acts of hostility toward the Italian army, with the goal of taking possession of its weapons in order to prevent their ending up in partisan or in Croatian hands.¹¹

The Yugoslav National Liberation Army likewise attempted to take advantage of the new scenario. Every day between the end of July and the end of August, fliers were found throughout Dalmatia urging Italian soldiers to turn themselves in of their own accord to partisan commands, with the assurance that they would not be harmed and the perspective of repatriation.

Mussolini's fall caused great concern in Berlin too, where it was feared Italy would reach a separate peace, and the Anglo-Americans might land in the Balkans at any moment. For these reasons, Hitler ordered that the Italian occupation forces in the Aegean pass under German command, and that the Italian units deployed in crucial positions be strengthened by German contingents.¹² Little did Hitler know that in those same days, on 17 August to be exact, in the course of a meeting held in Quebec, Churchill and Roosevelt had cast aside the idea of an attack on the Adriatic region, opting to open the second front the Soviets had called for in France.

Filled with confusion and fear, Italian troops waited for events to play out confined in their barracks, limiting themselves to carrying out what was absolutely required. On 8 September, Italy's military and civilian experience in the Balkans ended, and from that moment on Italy no longer played any part in the region.

¹¹ AUSSME, Fondo Calderini, 22354/S-Comando della II Armata: Elementi situazione Cetniaca, 8 August 1943.

¹² Aga Rossi, *Una nazione allo sbando*, 125.

DRAGANOVIĆ'S MISSION

By the spring of 1943, Archbishop Stepinac had become persuaded that the inevitable military defeat of the Axis powers would pave the way for the end of the Ustasha regime. It was not hard to foresee that this would determine the end of an independent Croatian state as well. In Croatia, the number of proindependence nationalists was dwindling with each passing day, while those in favor of reestablishing Yugoslavia on a federative basis were growing in number.¹³ The latter perspective and its many implications had been occupying Stepinac's mind, and the private meetings he had been carrying out. Stepinac had officially criticized the government's policies more than once, particularly its racial policies. Yet his attacks on the Ustasha leaders and his relations with the partisans did not seriously undermine his conviction that the regime's faults were greatly outweighed by its merits. These included the war on abortion, the ban on all pornography, the abolition of Masonry, decrees against blasphemy, the Christian education of soldiers, and increased endowments for divinity schools.¹⁴ The list of these good deeds was contained in a memorial Stepinac delivered to Pius XII during a visit to Rome in the spring of 1943, when he asked the pope to make every effort possible to ensure the survival of an independent Croatian state.¹⁵

Stepinac was convinced that the Axis would ultimately be defeated in the war, but he thought it was still possible, and desirable, for the fate

¹³ Alexander, *The Triple Myth*, 93.

¹⁴ ADSS, vol. 9, doc. 130, 220–22.

¹⁵ In 1946, during the trial against Stepinac, the prosecution produced a document allegedly by him (though the archbishop always denied writing it). According to this document, "the progress of Catholicism is closely linked with the progress of the Croatian state, and the survival of Catholicism depends on the survival of the Croatian state." Indeed, Communists and Chetniks were plotting "a vicious plan to annihilate Catholicism on the Adriatic's eastern coast." "If Croatia were lost," the document further stated, "not only would the 240,000 converts from Serbian Orthodoxy be lost too, but so would the entire Catholic population in the region, with all its churches and convents" (Falconi, *Il silenzio di Pio XII*, 400–1). According to the prosecution, Stepinac had delivered this document to Pius XII during his visit in the spring of 1943. The document is likely not the work of Stepinac, but of the Franciscan Radoslav Glavaš, head of the cult department in the ministry of justice (Alexander, *The Triple Myth*, 170).

of the Croatian state to be separated from that of the Ustasha regime. A sincere nationalist, he firmly believed in the need for a Croatian state as a bulwark against Orthodoxy and against communism. "The Catholic Church," Stepinac maintained, "can never recognize a system that seeks to take from the peasant his land, from the craftsman his shop, from a private person the fruit of his honest work, workers and men in general their souls. [...] We cannot accept," he went on, "a system that would turn our peasants into slaves of the state, [...] we cannot accept a system that denies the family, which the Church sees as a divine institution and the fundamental unit of the people, [...] we cannot recognize a system that would deny God himself."¹⁶

From this viewpoint, the fall of Fascism in Italy further complicated matters, and posed new problems. In August, Stepinac met with Monsignor Draganović in his headquarters in Zagreb. "Difficult days are before us, I think," the archbishop said. "The partisans or the Chetniks are bound to come here. If I could have my way, as the archbishop of Zagreb, I would prefer the partisans. If the Chetniks arrive, the very last of the newborns will be killed in the cradle in some Croatian lands. If the partisans arrive, the clergy and the intelligentsia will suffer, but the vast majority of the population will not."¹⁷ With these final words, the archbishop dismissed Krunoslav Draganović, who was about to leave for Rome for a delicate, twofold (diplomatic and humanitarian) mission. Monsignor Draganović was supposed to convince the Allied ministers of the need for Croatia to remain an independent state. Meanwhile, he was also entrusted with the task of providing assistance to the Croatian internees held in Italian prison camps. At the time, there were at least 10,000 Croats who had been deported from coastal regions and from islands in Croatia during the Italian occupation, with charges of anti-Italian or partisan activities.¹⁸ For the dip-

¹⁶ Alexander, *The Triple Myth*, 98.

¹⁷ HDA, RSUP SRH SDS, 001.14, Istražni zapisnik Krunoslava Draganovića, 1.

¹⁸ Dozens of deportation camps had been set up in Italy for Slovenes and Croats coming from the occupied territories. There were camps in Trieste, Gonars and Visco (Udine), Monigo (Treviso), Chiesanuova (Padua), Grumello (Bergamo), and elsewhere.

lomatic aspects of his mission, Draganović had an unofficial mandate from the Ustasha government, and in this capacity would work alongside Prince Lobkowicz as a delegate to the Vatican. As for the “humanitarian tasks” he was to carry out, “he had a regular mandate from the Red Cross and from the archdiocesan Caritas in Zagreb.”¹⁹

Traces of Draganović’s diplomatic work are subtle. He carried out his business with great patience and discretion, as befitted his position as an unofficial ambassador. As a result, his dealings did not leave a mark on the documents found in the most easily accessible sources. It is known that during the last months of 1943 he produced a long memorandum in German, intended for the British minister to the Vatican. The document called for Croatia’s independence to be maintained, or at least, if that was not possible, for a Danubian federation of Central European peoples to be established.²⁰ One of the few available documents attests to a meeting—once again centered on the future of Croatia—between the Croatian priest and Baron Gabriel Apor, the Hungarian minister to the Holy See.

Draganović’s intentions were consistent with the Vatican’s. The Holy See had likewise been nursing a plan for a Central and Eastern European confederation. The first signs of this may be found in a meeting between Cardinal Pizzardo and Lobkowicz, held in June 1943, when his eminence openly addressed the issue of a Danubian confederation, supporting the idea that Croats and Serbs should live separately. The rather elaborate Vatican plan involved the restoration of the Habsburg Empire under the crown of Otto of Austria, entrusted with the task of building “a necessary barrier against the spread of Protestantism from the north, of communism from the east, and of Orthodoxy from the south.”²¹ Very similar courses of action had been carefully considered in the United States, where many believed Eastern European nations would not be able to survive as individual entities.

¹⁹ Krizman, *Pavelić u bjelostvuu*, 198.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Dedijer, *The Yugoslav Auschwitz and the Vatican*, 395.

Draganović sent *Croazia Sacra* (Sacred Croatia) to press at the end of the year.²² The book was intended to exalt the role Croatia had had for centuries as a bulwark of Christianity: “The noble title of Antemurale Christianitatis that Pope Leo X bestowed on it is not merely a pretty award,” Draganović wrote, “but first and foremost a bloody reality. The task Croats performed in the centuries-long wars against the Turks was immensely great and grave. [...] In Christian Europe’s titanic struggle against Islamic aggression, the Croatian people stood fast on the front line for five long centuries, defending Catholicism and Western culture.”²³ Clearly, the book’s aim was to weld the past with the present, a time on which the threat of communism loomed large, and convey the message that only an independent Croatian state with deep Catholic roots would be able to prevent the westward expansion of atheist Bolshevism.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE ITALIAN ARMISTICE

On the evening of 8 September, Marshal Badoglio’s voice was heard by the Italian soldiers deployed on Yugoslav land. His orders were to cease all hostilities against the Anglo-Americans, and to react to “attacks coming from any other direction.”²⁴ It was an ambiguous message, further complicated by loss of a chain of command when General Robotti and the high officers of the 2nd Army immediately fled the Balkans, leaving troops in the barracks to deal with the ensuing chaos of orders and counterorders, panic and disorientation.

²² The book, written in Italian and printed by Tipografia Agostiniana, was authored by several members of the clergy and comprised twelve essays, which followed the tracks of Croatia’s Christianization throughout history, focusing on the constant presence of religious orders in the country, on the widespread development of Catholic associations and of a Catholic press in Croatia, and even on the diffusion of Croatian Franciscans in the world, alongside Croatian emigrants. The preface was signed by the authoritative Cardinal Pietro Fumasoni Biondi, prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith and protector of the Pontifical Croatian College of St. Jerome.

²³ Draganović, *Croazia Sacra*, 183.

²⁴ Aga-Rossi, *Una nazione allo sbando*, 12.

Believing the capitulation of Italy (decried as “a false ally”) would allow him greater freedom, Pavelić voided the Pacts of Rome, declaring his full sovereignty over coastal regions. In Zagreb, the Ustasha started calling for Trieste to be handed over to Germany, and Rijeka [Fiume] to Croatia. The *poglavnik* entreated all refugees to return to Dalmatia, trusting that through the annexation of Istria, Rijeka, and—above all—Dalmatia to the Independent State of Croatia, the Ustasha movement would be fully rehabilitated in the eyes of the local population, and many partisans would desert their armies and go home.²⁵ But none of this happened, for Germans had no intention of letting Croats take control of the lands previously occupied by Italians. The Croatian government likely did not have an accurate perception of reality. Before stepping down from his post at the helm of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Lorković had stated that “the insurgents were foreigners, not Croats.”²⁶ But he was wrong, for thousands of Croats fought in the Yugoslav National Liberation Movement.

Subsequent developments therefore took the Ustasha by surprise. Even though the British had failed to warn Tito in time about the armistice, the Yugoslav National Liberation Army managed to catch the Ustasha and the Chetniks off guard, exploiting the new situation to its advantage. Thousands of partisans from Bosnia flooded Dalmatia. Greeted by the local population as liberators, in two weeks’ time they seized a great quantity of weapons, ammunition, equipment, and food supplies, even briefly occupying—before the Germans arrived—a large part of the lands previously under the control of the 2nd Army.²⁷ The prestige and armaments of Tito’s army increased significantly. In a short time, roughly 80,000 new fighters spilled out from the territories previously occupied by the Italians. Within a month of 8 September, partisan troops doubled, and by the end of 1943 their number climbed

²⁵ Bilandžić, *Hrvatska moderna povijest*, 151.

²⁶ Kisić-Kolanović, *NDH i Italija*, 331.

²⁷ Pirjevec, *Il giorno di San Vito*, 179.

to 300,000.²⁸ Among these men were many Italian soldiers committed to fighting against the Germans. As many as 8,000 Italian soldiers died in the liberation of Yugoslavia by May 1945, exceeding the number of those who had died during the two years of the Italian occupation by 3,000.²⁹

Political support followed success on the battlefield. In the course of 1943, antifascist councils were set up in many Yugoslav regions. The Zemaljsko Antifašističko Vijeće Narodnog Oslobođenja Hrvatske (Antifascist Council for the National Liberation of Croatia, ZAVNOH) was born in Croatia on 1 March, and in June it appointed a directorate presided over by the poet and author Vladimir Nazor. During later meetings, the organism became the country's executive and legislative body. At the same time, other antifascist boards were being set up in Slovenia, in Montenegro, in the Bay of Kotor, in Sandžak, and in Vojvodina. What's more, during previous months, the principle whereby one nation was to result in one federal unit, which entailed an autonomous Bosnia-Herzegovina, had taken root in the Yugoslav Communist Party.

Thus, the second Antifascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ) was established in Jajce in November 1943, as the "supreme legislative and representative body of Yugoslavia." A National Committee for the Liberation of Yugoslavia (NKOJ) was further set up as a body endowed with all the features of popular government. The most important decision the committee made was that Yugoslavia would be founded on federal principles, so that it might "truly be the homeland of all its peoples [...] and ensure full equality of rights to Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians and Montenegrins, the peoples of Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, respectively."³⁰

²⁸ Bilandžić, *Hrvatska moderna povijest*, 151.

²⁹ On the part played by Italian soldiers in the liberation of Yugoslavia, see Scotti, *Il battaglione degli straccioni*, and, by the same author, *Ventimila caduti*.

³⁰ Bilandžić, *Hrvatska moderna povijest*, 154.

THE USTASHA'S ATTEMPTS TO SALVAGE THE CROATIAN STATE

By the early months of 1943, dissent against Pavelić within the Ustasha government had become rather explicit, and occasioned an exchange of ideas among party leaders on how to save the Croatian state.

The aim of turning the regime into a national government including the Peasant Party was born in response to this ferment. Traces of this political project may be found in the correspondence between Perić and Lorković. Ambassador Perić believed “the regime’s practice of terror and plunder was its weak spot,” and saw his interlocutor as one of the party leaders capable of managing the crisis, getting close to Maček, and, in time, replacing Pavelić. Lorković accepted Perić’s wishes as his own, and in August 1943 started conducting negotiations with prominent members of the Peasant Party, like August Košutić, Josip Torbar, and Ivan Andres. While not opposed, on principle, to the idea of entering an alliance with moderate Ustashism, Košutić set forward three conditions: constitutional reform, free elections, and the proclamation of the new constitution by the parliament.³¹ Believing such a plan to be impracticable at that time, Lorković presented Peasant Party leaders with the counteroffer to set up a coalition government first, and then, once the war was over, turn to their suggested reforms. A similar course of action would have made the Peasant Party complicit in the crimes committed by the Ustashas, however, and therefore the plan was never followed through.

To make matters worse, Radio London was urging Croatian Peasant Party members to stop stalling and join the fight against occupation forces.³² Peasant Party leaders only accepted British entreaties in part, though, leaving local leaders free to join the partisans, form their own armed groups, or wait to see how events played out.

The failed negotiations with the Peasant Party persuaded Pavelić to seek a different strategy. On 2 September, he set up a new execu-

³¹ Kisić-Kolanović, *NDH i Italija*, 359.

³² In truth, the British secretary of state for foreign affairs, Eden, had been asking Maček to mobilize against the Nazi fascists for two years by now.

tive government, placing Nikola Mandić—a Bosnian politician unconnected to the Ustasha movement—at its helm, and further drawing a number of politicians who had been active in the Peasant Party into the new cabinet. The *poglavnik* took these measures fully of his own accord, without consulting with anyone. It was merely an outward display of change, however, for it did not alter the balance of power (indeed, it only helped Pavelić reaffirm his authority), or the government's course.

The steps Pavelić took in the following period reflect his conviction that Croatia, because of its geostrategic position, fell within the Allies' sphere of influence, and that the latter would never allow the Soviets to reach the Adriatic. He believed a latent conflict already existed between the USSR and the Western bloc. Therefore, he trusted that it would be possible to come to an understanding with the Anglo-Americans. The mission carried out by Colonel Ivan Babić of the Croatian army must be viewed against this backdrop. In January 1944, Babić flew to Bari and presented the Allied Command with a plan for an armistice and Croatia's commitment to deploy its army against the Germans. Yet this initiative too proved a failure. The Anglo-American allies arrested Babić, and his proposal was not pursued. The unwillingness on the part of the Anglo-American camp to engage in any kind of negotiation did not stem from what was happening in the Yugoslav region at the time, but from Roosevelt's firm determination to abide by the deals made with Stalin. For months, Pius XII too had been trying to convince Washington to set out on the path of negotiations to reach peace with Germany. The pope had broached this issue during several meetings with Myron Taylor, Roosevelt's personal envoy to the Vatican, without ever managing to put a dent in the idea that Germany's "unconditional surrender" was the only route to peace.

The military situation further deteriorated in Croatia in the following period, as Anglo-American incursions and air bombing intensified over Zagreb, Zadar, Šibenik, and Split. In the face of increasing military pressure and the certainty of the Axis's defeat, work was resumed on the initiatives set forth by the moderate wing of the Ustasha. The

new plan conceived by Lorković and Vokić, his colleague in the armed forces, “entailed setting up a pro-Allies government,” which would enjoy the military “support of the Chetniks and of the Croatian army,” and would be led politically by the Peasant Party.³³ The plan took shape late in the spring of 1944, and entered its decisive phase in the summer. Vokić openly addressed his intended strategy with a group of generals of the army in the course of a meeting held in Sarajevo in July, and received their support. To gain greater credibility in the eyes of Western forces, the passage of power would have the semblance of an anti-Ustasha coup.

By many accounts, Lorković informed Pavelić of the project too, and received his approval to engage in action against the Germans and hand the power over to Maček. Still, everything seems to indicate that the *poglavnik* was not sincere in his declarations. On the night of 30 August, during a session of the Council of Ministers, Pavelić accused Lorković and Vokić of taking action against the Germans independently, plotting with members of the Peasant Party. The two ministers were forced to announce their resignations. In a somewhat nebulous statement, not without rhetoric, they motivated these to the public as “an effort to strengthen the country in view of decisive battles to come.”³⁴ The truth surfaced some time later, when the two ministers were tried for high treason for the attempted coup. In the course of the hearing, both Lorković and Vokić reported that they had kept Pavelić abreast of their plan at all times. The most convincing explanation of the *poglavnik*’s complete turnaround is that he’d feared the Allies might land in Dalmatia, and believed that in that event the plan laid before him by Lorković and Vokić might prove helpful. Once the threat had subsided, however, he’d had no qualms about getting rid of the two.

According to Mehmed Alajbegović, the former Croatian foreign affairs minister, “a plan even existed whereby Monsignor Stepinac would

³³ Ibid., 424.

³⁴ Ibid., 423.

serve as *locum tenens* after Pavelić was eliminated. With regard to this, Stepinac visited Maček in the company of General Moškov.”³⁵ No other confirming evidence exists, though, and it is likely that the plan had only been drawn in broad outline.

Attempts to establish fruitful contact with the Allies were intertwined with initiatives prefiguring the fall of the regime and seeking to organize the logistics of the Ustasha leaders’ flight from Croatia. An American document from November 1943 reveals that Pavelić’s government had already acquired sixty Argentine passports, while transferring funds to the South American country.³⁶ In keeping with these steps, during the first months of 1944, Vilim Cecelja, a military vicar, left Croatia to make arrangements for a Croatian section of the Red Cross in Austria. The mission’s aim was officially to bring material and moral assistance to wounded Croatian soldiers. In fact, the prelate was zealously working to build a network of hideaways and prepare new identities for the Ustasha leaders, exploiting the procedures in place for the International Red Cross, which provided refugees fleeing their countries of origin with new documents.³⁷

The next step was to transfer assets in the form of gold and money to neutral countries for safekeeping. The Ustasha chose Switzerland for this purpose. On 31 May 1944, a first deposit of 358 kilograms of gold was made to an account in the Swiss National Bank, opened in the name of the Croatian National Bank. On 4 August, the Swiss bank accepted another 980 kilograms of gold.³⁸ All the gold came from the Croatian National Bank’s reserves. The amount transferred on 4 August had likely been removed from the Sarajevo branch of the National Bank of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1941, when the Ustasha had seized power.³⁹ A part of the amount transferred on 31 May was likely the booty acquired by the regime through the killing of Serbs and Jews.

35 Revelli, *L’Arcivescovo del genocidio*, 251.

36 NARA, RG 226, OSS, OB 6362; Aarons and Loftus, *Ratlines*, 98; Goni, *The Real Odessa*.

37 Aarons and Loftus, *Ratlines*, 102.

38 Slany, *U.S. and Allied Wartime and Postwar Relations and Negotiations*, 145.

39 Ibid.

Drawing a complete picture of Croatian assets in Switzerland is a difficult task, both because of the local authorities' well-known reticence on such matters and because deposits were not made by the government alone, but also by hierarchs, businessmen, and functionaries from several ministries. Since 1943, all these men began moving back and forth between Zagreb and Berne, giving rise to substantial financial flows.⁴⁰ However, a US intelligence report estimates that the assets connected to the Croatian government, subsequently frozen, were worth about 15–16 million Swiss francs, equal to about US\$3.5–3.7 million.⁴¹ While only taking into account financial transactions ascribable to the government, this estimate indicates that the 358 and 980 kilograms of gold, worth about US\$1.5 million, were just a part of the plunder the Croatian government had transferred abroad in anticipation of a quick escape.

TITO IN BELGRADE

Despite decisions by the Antifascist Council (AVNOJ), Yugoslavia's future political order remained a crucial point. In February 1944, Churchill contacted Tito and told him it was necessary to reach an agreement with Mihailović and the king, in order to allow the latter to return home and mobilize Serbia for the final phase of the war. Tito answered in no roundabout way that he was not open to any kind of understanding with the sovereign, and that the best course of action would be for the Allies to recognize the Antifascist Council as Yugoslavia's new political and legislative body. Churchill was not satisfied with Tito's answer, but realized that—in order to promote an agreement between Tito and the king in exile—he would have to resort to the mediation of someone the Yugoslav statesman was not opposed to. With this end in mind, Churchill forced King Peter to remove the conservative Božidar Purić as prime minister of the Yugoslav govern-

⁴⁰ AUSSME, Fondo Calderini, M3, Relazione di Pièche dalla Serbia, 4.

⁴¹ Slany, *U.S. and Allied Wartime and Postwar Relations and Negotiations*, 145–46.

ment abroad, and to appoint in his place the former Ban of Croatia Ivan Šubašić, an admirer of Tito who had just returned from the United States. Thanks to the efforts on the part of Churchill and Eden, on 14 June, Ivan Šubašić reached Tito in his headquarters on the island of Vis (Lissa), and set forth his “proposals, optimistic to the point of naivety,” for Tito to consider: “in his opinion, the National Liberation Movement was to recognize the royal government, and enter it with some members of its own, first and foremost Tito, who would replace Mihailović as the minister of war.”⁴²

The outcome of the discussion, greatly influenced by the actual deployment of forces on the ground, was the exact opposite of what the British had hoped for: Šubašić was obliged to acknowledge that the National Liberation Movement was the expression of the will of the peoples of Yugoslavia, and, as far as his government was concerned, to settle for a distinctly secondary role.

By the end of the summer, the situation throughout Central and Eastern Europe had completely changed from the previous months, for the Red Army had occupied Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. On 25 August, Paris was freed by the Allied troops that had landed in Normandy early in June. Events were speeding up, and Tito saw all the implications of this. On 21 September, he flew to Moscow, where he made a deal for the Red Army to enter Yugoslavia temporarily, in order to help the Yugoslav army in the liberation of Belgrade and Serbia. The 2nd Bulgarian Army further strengthened this vast military support. Belgrade was liberated on 20 October, followed in subsequent weeks by all of Serbia and Vojvodina. On 24 October, Tito made his first speech from the balcony of the White Palace, formerly King Alexander’s residence, and from that time on served as the leader of the Yugoslav government in the federal capital.

The liberation of Serbia dealt Mihailović’s Chetniks a terrible blow, made worse by the king’s decision to place his trust with Tito and the

⁴² Pirjevec, *Il giorno di San Vito*, 192.

partisans, against whom they had been fighting for three years. Completely disheartened, Mihailović and his following of about 15,000 men settled in eastern Bosnia, remaining hopeful that they would be able to return to Serbia the next spring and cause an uprising against the communists.⁴³

THE END OF THE CROATIAN STATE

Pressed by the events, Pavelić ordered a general mobilization in December 1944, and together with the Ustasha chief of staff decided to defend Zagreb to the bitter end. The partisans estimated that Pavelić could still count on about 200,000 men—113,000 deployed to defend the capital. It was what was left of the Croatian army, already reorganized twice, with many units being formed, reformed, and disbanded in the process. The first reorganization took place in May 1943, when Croatia was divided into three military regions; the second in November 1944, when the army was merged with the Ustasha militia, giving rise to the Croatian Armed Forces (*Hrvatske Oružane Snage*).

In the autumn of 1944, work was started on the “Zvonimir Line,” a defense front the Ustasha believed would make Zagreb unassailable by the partisans. The plan was for the fortification to run from Karlovac to Koprivnika and to the River Drava, passing through Dugo Selo. Yet only a small segment of the Zvonimir Line had been completed by the spring of 1945, while work on the rest hadn’t even been started.⁴⁴ Thus, in the first months of 1945, the Ustasha government came up with an alternative plan. If the Yugoslav Liberation Army occupied Zagreb, civilians would be evacuated and sent to Germany with a part of the armed forces, while the rest of the local army would remain in Croatia, and engage in a guerrilla war against the communists.⁴⁵ Pavelić placed much hope in the Wehrmacht’s Army Group E, which had

43 Bilandžić, *Hrvatska moderna povijest*, 180.

44 Krizman, *Pavelić u bjekstvu*, 51.

45 Bilandžić, *Hrvatska moderna povijest*, 183.

fought in Greece under General Lohr and was now going up through the Balkans on its way to Austria. Army Group E comprised several well-equipped divisions and the *poglavnik* thought it would thwart the partisans' advance or, in the worst-case scenario, shield the Croatian Armed Forces and civilians as they retreated to Germany. Lohr's divisions did in fact create a broad front in Syrmia, blocking the advance of the Yugoslav army toward Zagreb for four months, starting in November 1944.

The Yugoslav army's final assault on the Germans and the Ustasha started between the end of March and the first days of April 1945. "For political rather than strategic reasons," Tito organized a broad front, deploying about 180,000 men. The offensive launched against Army Group E included both the 2nd Army from Bosnia and the 4th Army from Lika. This is one of the most controversial chapters in the history of the national liberation of Yugoslavia, for chasing the German army—which was quickly retreating anyway—resulted in the death of about 30,000 partisans, most of them young students and intellectuals hailing from the best Serbian families, recruited after the region's liberation.⁴⁶

The Conference of Yalta between Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin ended in a way that was essentially favorable to the partisan leadership. The Allies demanded that Tito set up a coalition government with Šubašić, in the spirit of the agreement of Vis, and also called for a greater representativeness of the AVNOJ. Furthermore, it was decided that a temporary parliament would be appointed until a constitutional assembly was set up, and it would comprise members of the AVNOJ and members of the prewar Skupština who had not compromised themselves by having dealings with the enemy. Tito deemed this a good compromise. Thus, on 7 March, a temporary coalition government was

⁴⁶ Pirjevec, *Il giorno di San Vito*, 198. Some historians have attributed to Tito the will to liquidate a part of Serbian intelligentsia in this way. A nationalist perspective on the matter taints such an interpretation of the events, however. It is far more likely that Tito realized that in order to obtain Trieste it would be necessary to get to the Julian capital before the Allies did.

established with Milan Grol (as vice president) and Ivan Šubašić (as foreign affairs minister), which also included other noncommunists, like Juraj Šutej (of the Croatian Peasant Party) and Sava Kosanović (of the Independent Democratic Party). The government of the new Yugoslavia was officially recognized on 20 March by Great Britain, on 28 March by the United States, and on 29 March by the Soviet Union.

THE DESTRUCTION OF JASENOVAC

Early in April, as the Yugoslav National Liberation Army launched its final offensive, the Ustasha began preparing to leave Jasenovac and the other concentration camps set up on Croatian soil. Luburić decided to have all the surviving prisoners killed, and to burn Jasenovac to the ground, in order not to leave any trace of the horrors that had occurred in that small portion of land along the banks of the Sava. On 22 April, when the partisans were only a few dozen kilometers from Jasenovac, there were still 1,060 prisoners in the camp. The Ustashas gathered all of them in a large building next to the main warehouses. Then they barricaded the doors and windows, intending to blow up the building with dynamite, or to set it on fire. From the confusion and fear in the eyes of the handful of guards left in the camp, the internees realized that the partisans were near and that unless they acted fast, they would soon meet a tragic end. Thus, the prisoners decided to engage in a life-and-death struggle against the guards. The final part of the struggle took place near the camp's eastern gate. About eighty prisoners managed to escape and find refuge in the nearby woods, where, a few hours later, they met the partisan vanguards. Back at the camp, 520 prisoners died in an unfair fight, while the Ustashas slaughtered all the others who had stayed behind.⁴⁷

Something similar occurred in the town of Jasenovac, where 147 prisoners were still being held captive in the "tannery." In those same hours, many buildings in the various camps were blown up and the oth-

⁴⁷ Zemaljska Komisija Hrvatske za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača, 60.

ers burned to the ground, while registers and all other administrative material had already been destroyed. All that remained of Jasenovac was rubble and ruin. Only the memory of those who survived would make it possible to reconstruct all that had happened in the main Ustaša death camp.

AFTER THE FALL, THE FLIGHT

When the Yugoslav National Liberation Army crushed the German and Ustasha front in mid-April, it became clear that the plan of retreating to Germany would have been hard to put into practice. Germany itself was in the grip of chaos. On 16 April, with two and a half million men at his command, Marshal Žukov began operations against Berlin, defended by about one million Germans. At the beginning of the month, the Anglo-Americans had entered Hamburg, and on 30 April they met with the Red Army that was coming from the east on the Elbe. That day Hitler took his life; Mussolini had been captured on 27 April and killed the next day.

Even as his protectors disappeared from the scene never to return, Pavelić hoped he could reach an agreement with the Allies. During one of the government's final sessions, it was decided to send the Allied command a memorandum, stating "that the Independent State of Croatia [did] not belong to the bloc of fascist countries, nor [did] it have a fascist ideology, and that it [was] fighting for the defense of its national state."⁴⁸ Signed by all government ministers, the document was entrusted to Minister Vrančić, who would deliver it to Marshal Alexander. Vrančić left Zagreb on 4 May, reached Austria by airplane, and went to Italy, where he managed to get in touch with the British in Venice. He was accommodated in a hotel, and the memorandum was dispatched to the Allied headquarters in Caserta, where it was completely disregarded.

⁴⁸ Bilandžić, *Hrvatska moderna povijest*, 185.

The other messages the Ustasha tried to send to Italy by way of two military aircrafts did not fare any better. The pilots bore three letters: one written by Pavelić and intended for the Allied command in Caserta, the other two written by Archbishop Stepinac and addressed to the Vatican and to the Spanish embassy in Rome.⁴⁹ Forced to land near Zagreb, the two warplanes were seized by the British and Yugoslavs. Nothing was ever known of the letters they carried.

These attempts, conducted in the final phases of the war, stemmed from desperation, rather than any real chance of success. Tito and his army had full control of the military situation on the ground. Meanwhile, the Anglo-Americans had no intention of upsetting the balance reached in Yalta. A note the British secretary of state for foreign affairs Eden addressed to Churchill confirms the Allies' unwillingness to heed Pavelić's proposals. Anti-Titoists wished to offer the Allies their services, he told Churchill. Yet to accept would have been most unpleasant, Eden felt. Indeed, it would have been hard to justify collaboration with units that had openly collaborated with the Germans up until then.⁵⁰

On 3 May, the *poglavnik* delivered his last public speech before a women's association in Zagreb: "We shall continue on the road we have set out on, the road to independence for the Croatian people. [...] We are not the masters of the world, but we are the masters of our will, and of our life. Rest assured that [...] we will commit our every effort [...] to defending even the smallest part of the Independent State of Croatia."⁵¹

Yet the decision to abandon the capital had already been made by the government on 30 April. Only Vjekoslav Maks Lururić, recently nominated commander of the Croatian Armed Forces, had supported the idea of defending Zagreb to the bitter end. As for the partisans, they had sent the Ustasha the clear message that they would destroy the city, if they met resistance.

49 Diplomatski Arhiv Ministarstva Spoljnih Poslova (Historical-Diplomatic Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; henceforth MSPS), fond PA, 1945, f. 19, d. 1, sig. pov. 878/45.

50 Ravančić, "Controversies about the Croatian Victims," 36.

51 Krizman, *Pavelić u bjekstvu*, 10.

On 5 May, Pavelić issued his last decree, abolishing all racial laws. It was his last-ditch attempt to soften the Allies, though nothing could change the course of events at this point. Before fleeing, Ustasha leaders handed the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs over to Archbishop Stepinac, and Minister Mirko Puk plundered the vaults of the Croatian National Bank, taking whatever assets were still being held there: gold, valuables, and cash in multiple currencies.⁵² Almost all the members of the Ustasha government and high-ranking officials were given gold coins and foreign banknotes.

Pavelić left Zagreb on the afternoon of 6 May, with a following made up of officials and their families. The convoy, comprising many cars and trucks, got on the Maribor-Klagenfurt route intending to reach Austria. There were two ways these people could flee Croatia and turn themselves in to the Allies: they could proceed toward the coast and, passing through Istria, reach Trieste and Julian Venetia, or they could arrive in Carinthia through one of the passes in the Karawanks. Roads were more numerous toward Carinthia, and Lohr's Army Group E was retreating in that direction. Thus, the Ustasha leaders decided to travel with the Wehrmacht in hopes of being less vulnerable. Four years before, the Ustashes had entered Croatia following Axis troops, and now, after their defeat, they were forced to leave the country in their company.

In those same hours, two other convoys departed from Zagreb. The first one comprised sixteen Ustasha ministers, including Lovro Sušić, Mehmed Alajbegović, Stjepan Hefer and Dragutin Toth. The second one was made up of the top echelons of the Peasant Party: Vladko Maček, Ivan Pernar, Josip Reberski, and Josip Torbar. After much hesitation and many changes of opinion, the second group had decided to leave Croatia as well, in spite of the fact that Ivan Šubašić, a fellow party member and a personal friend of theirs, had been appointed as the foreign affairs minister of Tito's government. Yet Šubašić counted very

⁵² Ibid.

little in the government, on account of the preponderance of the Yugoslav Communist Party. Maček, who had a permit signed by a US army officer, decided it would be wiser to emigrate and be close to Western chancelleries, where he still hoped he could play a political role, keeping in contact with Šubašić back home.⁵³

Pavelić and his following made a first stop in the spa town of Rogarška Slatina on the evening of 7 May. On 8 May, the *poglavnik* held a meeting, during which, according to a witness's account, he tried to raise the morale of his companions. Vjekoslav Maks Luburić was nominated commander of the Croatian Armed Forces, and it was decided that these would surrender only to the British or to the Americans.⁵⁴ This was Pavelić's last act in his capacity as *poglavnik* of the Independent State of Croatia. That same evening, in Topolšica, a town not far from Maribor, General Lohr signed the capitulation of Army Group E to the Yugoslav National Liberation Army.

After a stop in Maribor, Pavelić's convoy got on the road to Klagenfurt, but detoured toward Salzburg upon hearing that the Russians had already entered the Austrian city. The next morning, low-flying Russian planes attacked the convoy near Sankt Leonhard, killing and injuring some of its members. Once in Jundenburg, Pavelić thought he had reached an area occupied by the Americans, and that he could hand himself over to the Allies. He soon found out, though, that the latter had recently withdrawn from the area, and that the Soviets were about to enter the city. The route was changed several times in the heat of the moment, until the idea of going to Salzburg was abandoned altogether. Fearing the road before them would be barred by Red Army troops, Pavelić and his companions decided to leave their cars behind and go into hiding.

Colonel Ivan Kirin, Pavelić's personal guard, reported on those days: "After wandering through the woods for a fortnight or so, proba-

⁵³ Ibid., 43 and 45.

⁵⁴ Luburić remained at the head of the withdrawing Croatian Armed Forces for only three days. On 11 May, he abandoned his troops, returned to Zagreb, and immediately went to Mount Papuk, Slavonia, where he remained until the fall, leading a group of guerrilla fighters. Later, he moved to Hungary, then Italy, and finally Spain (Goldstein, *Hrvatska 1918–2008*, 354).

bly on 24 May, Pavelić and his fellow fugitives crossed the River Enns, which marked the border of the American zone.” Only then could Pavelić be sure that he had almost reached safety. He stopped in Lengreith, in a hunting castle owned by Count Nositz, who had fled to Paris years before when National Socialism made its entrance. Pavelić’s wife Mara and their daughter Višnja had already arrived in the castle, together with a small entourage, including two Italian maids. Pavelić’s first refuge in Austria, the castle was located in the forest, roughly 20 kilometers from Salzburg.⁵⁵

The ministers who had fled from Zagreb on 6 May managed to reach Austria, too. During the course of the journey, their convoy split into two: Alajbegović, Hefer, Sušić, Toth, Kuvedžić, and Mehičić stopped in Krumpendorf, a short distance from Klagenfurt, while Mandić, Artuković, Balen, Canki, Dumandžić, Frković, Kulenović, Makanec, and Tortić, for fear of the Russians, moved toward the area of Salzburg, arriving in Turracher Höhe, on the lake of the same name. This second group left Turracher Höhe on 15 May and made it to Tamsweg, where it further split up: Canki, Mandić, and Makanec were lodged in Count Kinnburg’s residence, and the others in a hotel in Prebersee.⁵⁶

The next day, Canki, Mandić, and Makanec showed up before a British command. They were taken to the camp in Spittal, on the Drava. They thought their troubles were over. But on 18 May the British authorities took them to Rosenbach, and turned them in to the Yugoslavs.⁵⁷

The account given by Dolores Bracanović, the only woman present in Pavelić’s party, painted a gloomy picture of the mood pervading the Ustasha.⁵⁸ The Russians and Yugoslav army units loomed nearby, and the Allies’ stance was also uncertain, making the escape full of unknowns.

⁵⁵ Krizman, *Pavelić u bjekstvu*, 20.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁷ Admiral Steinfl was handed over to the Yugoslav authorities, along with the three.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

BLEIBURG

Starting on 6 May, a few thousand men, women, and children left Zagreb and headed north, hoping to reach the Austrian border and hand themselves over to the Anglo-Americans. The bulk of the fugitives were soldiers of the Croatian army, war criminals, members of anti-communist parties (the Croatian Peasant Party, Serbian promonarchy parties, and the Slovene Clerical Party), and staff members from ministries and the public administration. Macedonian and Albanian elites, a part of the Montenegrin army, the small Albanian “Skanderbeg” division, and the “Hungarian Legion,” made up of Hungarians from the Bačka, from the Vojvodina and from the Banat, also took part in the retreat to Austria.⁵⁹

Generals Metikoš, Herenčić and Servatzky led the Croatian army’s withdrawal. The goal was to surrender to the British or the Bulgarians, and avoid falling in the hands of the Yugoslav army. The first part of the retreat was carried out in a rather orderly way. Only occasional skirmishes with partisan units were reported. But once in the area around Celje, in Slovenia, many columns of the Croatian army lost contact with their commands.⁶⁰ Meanwhile, partisan units—particularly 3rd Army units—were converging on Dravograd, near the Slovenian–Austrian border, where they managed to stop the advance of the huge civilian and military column, and also to surround it in part. On 12 May, near Dravograd, violent clashes took place. After two days of battle, three divisions of the Yugoslav army seized the bridges over the Drava, and at the same time, in Gornji Dolac, the 17th Bosnian Division repeatedly opened fire on the military and civilian column, causing a high number of victims.⁶¹

Between 11 and 14 May, however, a few small groups primarily made up of soldiers managed to enter Austria, and were interned in

59 Krizman, *Pavelić u bjekstvu*, 52.

60 Ravančić, “Controversies about the Croatian Victims,” 32.

61 Goldstein, *Hrvatska 1918–2008*, 357.

the prisoner-of-war camp in Viktring, near Klagenfurt, by the British army. It was a small part of the fugitives, for most soldiers and civilians were still on the other side of the border. On 13 May, the Croatian commanders sent the Allied command a memorandum: "Some 200,000 Croatian soldiers and 500,000 civilians, including the elderly, invalids, women, and children, are fleeing Tito's troops. This amounts to a sort of plebiscite on the part of the Croatian people, which reject both Tito and Bolshevism."⁶²

Because the road near Dravograd was closed off, on 14 May, the huge column—dozens of kilometers long—veered southwest, reaching a small valley close to the Austrian town of Bleiburg, just beyond the Slovenian border. Units of the Yugoslav army and the 38th Irish Infantry Brigade of the British army were already in Bleiburg then. A British official, General Patrick Scott, asked the Croatian commanders not to advance further, for Yugoslav partisans were present behind the British units, which might lead to incidents in the course of the night.⁶³ Under these circumstances, the Croatian delegates understood General Scott to be promising them that the thousands of civilian and military refugees would be free to resume their journey and step onto Austrian soil on the following day.

Determining the exact number of soldiers and civilians that set camp on the outskirts of Bleiburg would be difficult, but it is reasonable to assume there were about 100,000 people. Certainly, the arrival of such a mass of refugees was a destabilizing factor, which the British military was not prepared to face with its occupation forces. Yet another circumstance complicated matters further, and was decisive. During the previous days, Allied commanders and Marshal Tito had been at odds over the brutal conduct of the partisan troops in the occupation of Trieste. To avoid exacerbating this contention, the Anglo-

62 Krizman, *Pavelić u bjekstvu*, 94. According to recent estimates, based on the available documentation, there were 90,000 to 100,000 retreating soldiers and about 50,000 civilians; therefore, the column of fugitives fleeing Croatia was likely made up of 130,000 to 150,000 people, and it was 45 to 65 kilometers long (Goldstein, *Hrvatska 1918–2008*, 353).

63 Ravančić, "Controversies about the Croatian Victims," 32.

Americans wanted, if possible, to reach an agreement with the Yugoslavs on unsettled issues. Both of these aspects prompted the Allies to decide that the Croats should surrender, and hand over their weapons to the Yugoslav army.

In a subsequent meeting, attended by four Ustasha commanders, two partisan generals and a British official,⁶⁴ it was demanded that the Croatian soldiers put down their weapons within an hour. Further provisions of capitulation were that “civilian refugees would be repatriated to their homes in Yugoslavia, while soldiers would be interned under the protection of international laws and conventions on prisoners of war.”⁶⁵

From this moment on, the accounts of those who experienced these events are conflicting, or partial. It is therefore difficult to ascertain what exactly happened in the valleys of Bleiburg. Most soldiers surrendered, but others refused to put down their weapons and the partisan units opened fire against them, killing some—though it is impossible to say how many.⁶⁶ A certain number of soldiers dispersed into the forest. The killing of these fugitives in the days after 15 May is commonly known as the “Bleiburg massacre,” though what occurred was not a single event, but a series of acts spread over a rather broad area.⁶⁷

64 The meeting was attended by Vjekoslav Servatzy, Ivan Herenčić, Vladimir Metikoš, and Danjel Crljen for the Ustasha, Milan Basta and Ivan Kovačić-Efenka for the Yugoslav army, and General Scott on behalf of the Anglo-Americans.

65 Basta, *Rat je završen 7 dana kasnije*, 362.

66 Ravančić, “Controversies about the Croatian Victims,” 42. Milan Basta claims there were no victims near Bleiburg. See: Basta, *Rat je završen 7 dana kasnije*, 202–30, and 280–82. According to other sources, as many as 16, 27, or 40 people were killed. See Goldstein, *Hrvatska 1918–2008*, 363.

67 It is nearly impossible to establish the exact number of those who were killed in Bleiburg in May 1945, and in subsequent “death marches.” Still, many scholars and researchers have made estimates: Vladimir Žerjavić claims between 45,000 and 55,000 people died (*Žerjavić, Opsesije i megalomanije oko Jasenovac i Bleiburga*). Franjo Tuđman claims the number of victims was between 35,000 and 40,000 (Tuđman, *Bespuca povijesne zbiljnosti*). The Croatian historian Slavko Goldstein maintains that the number of victims did not exceed 20,000 (Goldstein and Goldstein, *Holokaust u Zagrebu*) and that most of these perished in the course of the “death marches.” Conversely, certain eyewitnesses, like the partisan commanders Milan Basta and Kosta Nađ, often accused of being the minds and hands behind the Bleiburg massacre, claim not very many Ustasha soldiers were killed (Basta, *Rat je završen 7 dana kasnije*; Brajović, *Konačno oslobođenje*). Finally, some Croatian nationalists maintain that 200,000 Croats died in Bleiburg.

The partisan general Milan Basta maintains that, after 16 May, civilians and soldiers of the Croatian army previously detained were freed and allowed to return home. Indeed, the repatriation of civilian and military prisoners, some of whom came from the Viktring camp near Klagenfurt, started during the following days. The British military put them on trains in groups, and told them they would be taken to Italy, when in fact they were being handed over to the Yugoslav authorities.

Some prisoners were killed by the partisan troops as soon as the trains they were on crossed the Yugoslav frontier. Others were arranged in interminable lines, and forced to retrace their steps toward Slovenia, where many of them died of hardships or hunger, or were killed by the partisans in the course of “death marches,” as they came to be known. The bodies of the killed refugees, often disfigured, were thrown in dozens of common graves, caves, and karst pits. According to the historian Ivo Goldstein, “there were no mass liquidations of prisoners, though it is clear that in different places many prisoners were killed without trial, either individually or in small groups.”⁶⁸ The partisans’ thirst for justice had turned into brutal revenge.

It was General Moškov who informed Pavelić that the Croatian troops, as well as thousands of civilians, had been turned in to the partisans. In his memoir, Moškov recounted that he had not seen the slightest sign of sorrow on the *poglavnik*’s face. Bewildered by such cold blood, the loyal Ustasha noted that, “in the face of great tragedy, Pavelić [had] always been outside of and above all known human emotions.”⁶⁹

USTASHA CRIMES: MEMORY, REPRESSION, AND EXPLOITATION

Fleeing Croatia in the spring of 1945, the Ustasha left behind a country that was in material ruin, and in even greater moral ruin. The crimes committed had left deep wounds in the soul of Yugoslav nations, which

⁶⁸ Goldstein, *Hrvatska 1918–2008*, 365.

⁶⁹ Kisić-Kolanović, *NDH i Italija*, 440–41.

in time would sediment in the collective memory. While there can be no reasonable doubt that the proportions of the massacres were blood-chilling, the issue—perhaps not essential in itself, but nevertheless important—of establishing the number of victims remains unsolved. The hundreds of accounts provided by survivors were useful to shed light on the conditions of the prisoners, as well as on the means and methods of their elimination. But by disposing of corpses in common graves, dismantling the infrastructure of the concentration camps, and destroying all the pertinent documents before taking flight, the Ustasha certainly made it very difficult for anyone to gauge the number of those who fell victim to the massacres. This is all the more true in light of the fact that the overall number of people killed during the war is also the object of controversy.

In a speech made in Ljubljana in May 1945, Tito claimed that in all of Yugoslavia 1,700,000 people died during the four years of the war. A year later, the Federal Commission charged with investigating the crimes committed by the occupiers made its own estimate of the number of victims. The results of this inquiry were never made public, perhaps because inconsistent with Tito's assessment.

The government subsequently appointed the Federal Statistical Office of Yugoslavia to calculate the number of victims using statistical and documentary methods. Vladeta Vučković, a young and recently hired mathematics graduate, carried out the task within a few days. He calculated the "demographic losses" sustained during the war to be 1,700,000. Demographers famously define these kinds of losses rather broadly, to include not only actual victims, but also those who were not born and those who emigrated in a given time frame. However, from that moment on, the Yugoslav government seized on this number, and officially acknowledged 1,706,000 victims, omitting the fact that these were in fact "demographic losses."⁷⁰ It's not hard to see why the newly established socialist Yugoslavia would have had an interest in inflating

⁷⁰ Kočović, *Žrtve drugog svetskog rata u Jugoslaviji*, xxi–xxii.

the number of deaths sustained during the war. Indeed, the greater its contribution to the Allies' victory over the Nazi fascists had been, the more it could expect to benefit in war reparations from defeated Germany. Before the international commission for war reparations in Paris, the Yugoslav foreign affairs minister Edvard Kardelj thus maintained that the Yugoslav victims had been 1,706,000.⁷¹

This claim needed to rest on adequate scientific support. In 1952, the director of the Federal Statistical Office, Dolfe Vogelnik, published an essay with a new estimate of the Yugoslav demographic losses during the Second World War. Based on the census data from 1948, Vogelnik assessed overall losses as being between 2,900,000 and 3,250,000 people.⁷² These figures, while only an approximation, made it possible to claim legitimately that the war victims had been 1,700,000—that is, the number already officially set forth by the Yugoslav government.⁷³

Germany did not accept this figure, and requested that Belgrade make a more accurate estimate. In 1964, the federal government decided to have a recount, availing itself of 30,000 collaborators spread throughout its republics. The ensuing research uncovered 597,000 death certificates belonging to killed soldiers and civilians.⁷⁴ The work, which was unquestionably very complex, had encountered several difficulties, and the publication of its findings had been repeatedly delayed. Realistically, this calculation failed to consider 30 percent of the victims. But in any case these results were at odds with what the Yugoslav government had been claiming for years, and so all documents pertaining to this calculation were classified as top secret in 1966, and researchers were prohibited from accessing them.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Vogelnik, "Demografski gubici Jugoslavije u drugom svetskom ratu."

⁷³ In the following issue of the same journal, however, another expert demographer, Ivo Lah, resolutely refuted Vogelnik's hypothesis, claiming that the demographic losses had certainly been smaller. Lah, "Istinski demografski gubici Jugoslavije u drugom svetskom ratu."

⁷⁴ Žerjavić, *Population Losses in Yugoslavia*, 68.

⁷⁵ The majority of the documentation collected in 1964 disappeared. Of all the work that was carried out, only 1,107,172 individual forms remain, compiled by the researchers on the ground, and contained in 2,948 boxes preserved in the Archives of Yugoslavia.

A second burden on historical truth, in addition to the one just described, concerned the matter of who was to be held accountable for the killings. In the new socialist Yugoslavia, the regime supported the thesis that the occupiers, rather than the Ustasha collaborators, had been responsible for the massacres and the most violent crimes carried out in those years. Underestimating the Ustasha's responsibilities, at least with regard to number of crimes committed, served the efforts that were being made to build a new social fabric, held together by communist Yugoslavism, as summarized by the motto "Fraternity and Unity."

The situation changed after Tito's death (1980), when the League of Communists' influence on Yugoslav society gradually diminished, and censorship was no longer able to stop the Yugoslav public's desire for an open debate and for answers. The controversy surrounding the victims of the Second World War reemerged forcefully, developing through the Serbian and Croatian ethnic-nationalist paradigms. Historiography failed to deal with these issues with the scientific rigor and serenity of judgment that would have been required. As a result, the process by which collective memory is formed was partial, tainted, or distorted. Thus mortified, history was turned into a mere resource available to the contemporary political struggle—a "usable past" nationalists could draw from, selecting and manipulating the myths they needed as they produced demonizing categorizations of the "other," by which all Serbs were seen as Chetniks, and all Croats as Ustashas.⁷⁶

A series of works by Serbian authors, who began focusing on the victims of Jasenovac in the mid-1980s, falls within this context. Among such authors were Radomir Bulatović,⁷⁷ whose *Koncentracioni logor Jasenovac* puts the number of people killed in the camp at about one million, Milan Bulajić,⁷⁸ who estimates between 500,000 and 700,000 victims, and Antun Miletić,⁷⁹ who in his monumental work lists the

⁷⁶ MacDonald, *Balkan Holocausts?*, 133.

⁷⁷ Bulatović, *Koncentracioni logor Jasenovac*.

⁷⁸ Bulajić, *Jasenovac*, 41 and 57.

⁷⁹ Miletić, *Koncentracioni logor Jasenovac*.

names of 26,000 disappeared people, claiming that the overall number was about 146,000. These works lack adequate documentary support, and are based on weak scientific foundations. Croatian revisionist authors have likewise produced studies that artificially diminish the number of those killed in Jasenovac and in the Independent State of Croatia, in an attempt to play down the Ustasha regime's responsibilities, all the while exaggerating the figures of the Bleiburg tragedy.⁸⁰

Removed from the categories of objective historical evaluation, the massacres carried out by the Ustasha and by the Chetniks were thus deformed into myths. Jasenovac and Bleiburg ended up being viewed not as concrete historical facts, but as symbolic places of the national martyrdom of Serbs and Croats, respectively. This "game of numbers," which the historian Ronnie Landau calls a "grotesque competition in suffering,"⁸¹ has caused the concealment of historical truth, through the sedimentation of layers of debris from which it is difficult for historians to draw objectively verifiable conclusions.

Impartial attempts to establish the total number of Yugoslav victims of the Second World War included that by two American expert demographers, Paul Myers and Arthur Campbell, who fixed it at 1,067,000.⁸² Their study has been followed by more recent research. The results reached by the Montenegrin Bogoljub Kočović and the Croat Vladimir Žerjavić merit attention for their accuracy and scientific rigor. The former claims there were 1,014,000 victims, while the latter puts the number at 1,027,000. These are very similar results by researchers who worked independently.⁸³

80 For example, see Matković, *Povijest Nezavisne Države Hrvatske*; Tuđman, *Bespuća povijesne zbiljnosti*; Omrčanin, *Hrvatska*.

81 Landau, *Studying the Holocaust*, 54, quoted in MacDonald, *Balkan Holocausts?*, 160.

82 Campbell, *A Method of Projecting Mortality Rates Based on Post-War International Experience*.

83 Demographic losses during the Second World War in Yugoslavia:

Kočović	Žerjavić	Vučković	Volgelnik
1,985,000	2,022,000	1,706,000	2,873,000 (at least)
			3,250,000 (at most)

In addition to assessing the overall number of victims in Yugoslavia at large, Žerjavić attempted to identify how many Serbs, Jews, Romani, and antifascist Croats had fallen victim to the massacres carried out in the Independent State of Croatia. He put the number of the Serbs who died in the independent state at 322,000. Most of these had been killed in villages and cities, while 93,000 had disappeared to death camps, prison, or karst pits.⁸⁴ Kočović believes the Serbs who died in the war were 334,000.⁸⁵ These figures include the Serbs that were killed by the Germans and Italians, and those who died fighting in the ranks of the Yugoslav National Liberation Army. Therefore, the number of Serbs who died in the massacres carried out by the Ustasha should be slightly lower. Kočović has set the number of Jewish victims of the Ustasha, all of whom were killed in death camps, at about 26,000. More specifically, 19,000 were killed in camps in the Independent State of Croatia, while the remaining 7,000 were killed in camps in Germany, to which they had been deported with the regime's complicity. A similar fate befell the Romani: 19,000 of them were killed within camps, though this is a rough number because of the added difficulties of acquiring reliable census information on a nomad population.⁸⁶ These cold calculations include the victims of Jasenovac, where, according to Žerjavić, between 80,000 and 100,000 people died.⁸⁷ According to the Croatian demographer, between 45,000 and 52,000 Serbs were killed in

Victims of the Second World War in Yugoslavia:

Kočović	Žerjavić	Vučković	Volgelnik
1,014,000	1,027,000	1,067,000	2,000,000*

* Approximate estimate

84 Žerjavić, *Population Losses in Yugoslavia*, 91.

85 Kočović, *Žrtve drugog svetskog rata u Jugoslaviji*, 51 and 56.

86 Ibid.

87 Estimate of the victims of the Jasenovac concentration camp:

Kočović	Žerjavić	1964 Federal Commission	Bulajić	Bulatović
85,000–100,000	85,000–100,000	49,874	About 500,000	700,000–1,000,000

In 2007, the Jasenovac Memorial Museum published a volume with all the names of the known victims of the concentration camp: 33,860 men, 19,327 women, and 19,006 children, totaling 72,193. It is likely that this list is incomplete, for a certain number of Romani may not have been taken into account. See Smreka and Mihovilović, *Poimenični popis žrtava koncentracijskog logora Jasenovac 1941–1945*.

Jasenovac, a number supplemented by 12,000 Croats and Muslims, all of them antifascists and opponents of the regime, 13,000 Jews, and 10,000 Romani.⁸⁸

Žerjavić's and Kočović's findings, the result of years of research, can only be verified by statistical or demographic methods, for any exact quantification is impossible. Their estimates are the most reliable to date, and, with all due caution, give an accurate representation of the proportions of the carnage perpetrated by the Ustasha.

88 Žerjavić, *Population Losses in Yugoslavia*, 73–83.

Part

3

**The Ustasha
and
the Cold War,
1945–59**

War Criminals on the Run

BLACKLISTS

In the years immediately following the Second World War, the history of the Ustasha followed mainly from their need to escape a reckoning with justice. Their fate was intertwined with that of Nazis, Fascists, and collaborators guilty of heinous crimes throughout occupied Europe.

The Yugoslav government in exile in London started denouncing the massacres perpetrated by the Ustasha in Croatia and Bosnia as early as the spring of 1941. The Polish government, which had likewise taken refuge in London, exposed “the decimation of the Polish leading classes in the Warthegau on the part of the SS,” and the French resistance also “decried the executions by firing squad of hostages in the part of France occupied by the Germans.”¹ On 22 June 1941, speaking on the radio, Winston Churchill said that, much like the Nazi leaders, collaborators would also be “delivered by us on the morrow of the victory to the justice of the Allied tribunals.”² In the second half of 1941, blood-curdling news started arriving from the East regarding the massacres at the hands of the *Einsatzgruppen*, special SS troops charged with the task of cleansing Soviet territories of political commissars, Romani, and, especially, Jews.³

On 12 January 1942, the representatives of nine governments in exile in London—Belgium, Czechoslovakia, De Gaulle’s Free France,

¹ Cattaruzza and Deak, *Il Processo di Norimberga*, 2.

² Quoted in Bower, *The Pledge Betrayed*, 21.

³ The *Einsatzgruppen*, active behind the eastern front, slaughtered 1,031,000 Jews, 178,000 Romani, and 41,000 Soviet political commissars. See Moracchini, *Les troupes special d’Hitler*.

Greece, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, and Yugoslavia—signed the Declaration of St. James's Palace. Recognizing that Germany, with the complicity of its allies, had established a regime of terror in occupied countries and was carrying out brutal crimes there, the signatories of the declaration indicated that convicting the people guilty of and responsible for those crimes, through regular trials, without distinction between instigators, perpetrators, and collaborators, should be one of the primary goals following the war.⁴

In the course of 1942, London and Washington gained irrefutable information on the death camps of Belzec, Treblinka, Chelmno, and Auschwitz-Birkenau. A United Nations committee was set up to investigate the war crimes, and, on 1 November 1943, the Allied foreign ministers drafted the Moscow Declaration—signed by Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin—definitively establishing the general criteria for the treatment of war crimes. The commitment made in Moscow became effective with the London Agreement, dated 8 August 1945, with which the three Allied governments, together with the provisional government of the French Republic, decided to institute an international military tribunal “for the trial of war criminals whose offences [had] no particular geographical location,” while those who had committed specific crimes in occupied territories or in Germany itself would be handed over to the courts of their respective countries to be judged and punished there.⁵

The International Military Tribunal held its opening session amid Berlin's ruins on 18 October 1945, then it moved to Nuremberg, where a court presided over by American, British, Soviet, and French judges held trial against “major war criminals.”⁶ Meanwhile, by a law issued on 20 December 1945, the Allied Control Council entrusted the commands of Germany's four occupation zones with the task of immediately subjecting to trial all others responsible for crimes of aggression,

4 Cattaruzza and Deak, *Il Processo di Norimberga*, 73.

5 Ibid., 74–75.

6 See Davidson, *The Trial of the Germans*.

war crimes, and crimes against humanity, as well as all people affiliated with the National Socialist Party, the SS, and the Gestapo—regarded, *in toto*, as criminal organizations, for having had said crimes as their end.⁷ However, having a law in place was not enough to ensure the punishment of war criminals. These would also have to be identified among the millions of internees, or captured if they'd gone into hiding, and handed over to justice.⁸

The United Nations War Crimes Commission had drafted its first blacklists between 1942 and 1943, based on reports made by Allied commands, the representatives of the governments in exile, Jewish committees, and resistance organizations. In September 1944, the Supreme Command of the Anglo-American Allied Forces assigned the task of appointing the courts and setting up the investigative framework to its own judicial apparatus, the Judge Advocate General (JAG), which became the central agency for war crimes. A few months later, the Central Registry of War Criminals and Security Suspects (CROWCASS) was established as a support to the JAG. CROWCASS was a military investigation center based in Paris: “utilizing the experience of Scotland Yard and FBI, it was to be the world’s biggest register of criminals.”⁹ CROWCASS prepared the records of wanted criminals, and issued them to the interment camps spread across Europe holding prisoners and refugees. When fugitives were found, their files were sent back to CROWCASS, complete with photographs, fingerprints, and a short biographical description of the subjects. In the three years it was in operation, between 1945 and 1948, the Central Registry of War Criminals and Security Suspects “transmitted 130,000 detention reports to investigative teams from a dozen countries,” processed 85,000 reports, and published forty registries of suspected war criminals.¹⁰

7 Cattaruzza and Deak, *Il Processo di Norimberga*, 64.

8 The Allied tribunals held 489 trials over all, and sentenced 1,306 defendants. The lists of the United Nations Commission included 2,500 more alleged criminals, who were never captured (Bower, *The Pledge Betrayed*, 220–21, and 361).

9 Bower, *The Pledge Betrayed*, 101.

10 Simpson, *Blowback*, 67.

Eisenhower considered the pursuit of war criminals one of the Allies' prime concerns. Thus, in his capacity as supreme Allied commander, he backed the judges at Nuremberg with several teams of investigators. Further, he placed the task of carrying out the investigations on the ground and in the interment camps of Germany, Austria, and Italy in the hands of each army's counterespionage units, the Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC). These were to work in full accord with CROWCASS and the JAG. Eisenhower's directives were not always followed, though.

To ensure the United States got the best German minds, snatching them from Soviet competition, the American secret services made long lists of scientists, engineers, and chemists who worked in the most sophisticated sectors of the Third Reich's arms industry. As early as May 1945, Washington's War Department launched a series of clandestine operations with which a thousand or so specialists in the fields of rocketry, submarines, explosives, and war medicine were taken to the United States from Germany, and immediately put to work in the Pentagon's programs. Almost all of them had been members of the National Socialist Party, or affiliated to the SS, and as such should have faced justice. Instead, their past was erased for the sake of the winners' higher interests.¹¹

While the conflict drew to a close, secret services in the East and in the West alike were already entering that long-term competition known as the Cold War, and many Nazis managed to take full advantage of this. General Reinhard Gehlen, who had directed the Wehrmacht's espionage against Russia, offered Americans the archives of the German military secret services, and was recruited by Washington and given generous funds to organize a network of secret agents and spies in the service of the United States.¹²

¹¹ The Soviets were equally eager to get their share of German scientists: with Operation Osoaviakhim alone they whisked a whole trainful of them back to Russia. See the already cited works by Simpson and Bower.

¹² Naftali, "Reinhard Gehlen and the United States," 376. Among the criminals recruited by Gehlen were SS officials like Erich Deppner, responsible for the deportation of 100,000 Jews from Holland, Werner Krassowski, captain of the SS-Totenkopf in the Polish camps, and

On a smaller scale, a “Gehlen case” occurred in Italy too, where the CIA recruited the fascist Prince Junio Valerio Borghese. During the Republic of Salò, the latter had been in charge of the Decima Flottiglia MAS, an elite naval sabotage unit of the Royal Italian Navy, working alongside the SS in antipartisan repression and committing brutal crimes. In Austria, the CIA recruited the Viennese Nazi Wilhelm Hoettl, the head of SS counterespionage in Hungary and the Balkans, very much involved in the deportation of Jews and in the plunder of their goods.¹³ Much like Gehlen, in order to carry out the missions the CIA gave them, Borghese and Hoettl recruited their former comrades in arms, who were thus ensured impunity. Whenever CROWCASS sought information on these wanted criminals, the CIC replied that they were nowhere to be found.

PLANS FOR SURVIVAL

It would be a mistake to lay the blame for the safety enjoyed by many war criminals on the winners only. Even during the war, those who would ultimately be defeated had started preparing for what was to come, and many neutral countries had been willing to lend a hand. The case of Switzerland—which Germans had been using since the end of the First World War as a financial platform to avoid sanctions imposed on them by the League of Nations—was emblematic in this regard. Indeed, between the two world wars, German financiers and industrialists, including businessmen active in the arms industry, created a close network of front companies, through which they operated ubiquitously. During the Second World War, this phenomenon intensified. When it came to the most sensitive investments, German corporations—private companies, or enterprises owned by the state, the SS, or the National

Konrad Fiebig, commander of the Einsatzkommando 9 that had slaughtered 11,000 Jews in Vitebsk.

13 On Italy, see Caretto and Marolo, *Made in USA*. For the case of Austria, see Goda, “The Nazi Peddler.”

Socialist Party—“hid behind an impenetrable smokescreen of nested boxes [...] with intermediate links located in several neutral countries and men acting as fronts for sham companies.”¹⁴

By the summer of 1944, Germany started feeling as if clamped in a vise. A memorandum to the White House, the so-called Morgenthau Plan, advocated breaking Germany up politically right after the war, and dismantling all of its industrial facilities. Thus reduced to an agrarian country, and left with no means to rearm itself, Germany would be forced to abandon any ambition for power.¹⁵ In light of this dire prospect, German industrialists had but one option: salvage what could be salvaged by moving any capital, patents, and high-technology plans they still held in their homeland abroad to neutral countries.¹⁶ In their turn, political leaders were raising the issue of how to ensure the covert survival of National Socialism in the event of defeat on the battlefield, with an eye to a future rebirth of the Reich. The National Socialist Party, headed by Martin Bormann, already held huge funds abroad, mostly made up of the war booty. The transferring of often-stolen bank bonds, extorted or looted diamonds, and banknotes (particularly perfectly counterfeited pound sterling notes) intensified—in increasingly clandestine forms—during the final phase of the conflict.

Like Switzerland, the Vatican had also remained neutral. In the course of the war, Anglo-American diplomats had made every attempt to bring Pius XII on the Allies' side, but to no avail. In a memorial addressed to US president Roosevelt in September 1941, the head of Vatican foreign affairs, Monsignor Tardini, wrote: “If the Russians win the war, then the victory will belong to Stalin; no one will ever be able to dethrone him. Stalin is communism, and a victorious communism is a

14 Commissione Indipendente d'Esperti Svizzeri, *La Svizzera*, 367. According to a census by the US Treasury Department, there were 759 financial and industrial companies established abroad with German capital in 1945, distributed in Switzerland, Spain, Portugal, Turkey, and Argentina.

15 The Morgenthau Plan was actually never put into effect: the Truman administration shelved it at the end of 1946. The Marshall Plan was launched the following year.

16 What is more, the Allies' countermeasures also loomed over German industries and assets abroad. See Kindleberger, *Storia della finanza nell'Europa occidentale*, 572f.

communism that is the absolute master of the European continent.”¹⁷ Therefore, the Holy See could not bless the alliance between the West and the Soviet Union, and until the war’s end it tried to facilitate peace negotiations between Germany and the Anglo-Americans in order to save the world from the threat of Bolshevism.

In a broad sense, the Vatican’s efforts proved useless in the face of the Allies’ resolve to fight until the enemy made an unconditional surrender. In Italy, however, things played out differently. Toward the end of 1944, Germans were in the process of withdrawing from the Eastern and Western Fronts, but remained firmly in command of Italy’s southern half thanks to a fully operational army of 800,000 men. If the Allies attacked the Gothic Line, German troops would retreat adopting a scorched earth policy in northern Italy—this was Hitler’s threat—and continue to fight in the Alps until their last man was dead. In the winter of 1944–45, through the mediation of Switzerland and the Vatican, SS secret services got in contact with the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS), and proposed a separate armistice on the Italian Front. Known as Operation Sunrise, the negotiation took place in Switzerland between the American lawyer Allen Dulles, the head of the OSS for southern Europe, and the German SS general Karl Wolff, chief of the personal staff and plenipotentiary of the Third Reich in Italy.¹⁸ Wolff offered Dulles the opportunity to take Italy on a silver platter, on the condition that German troops were allowed to return home to fight alongside the Allies against the Soviets. The Americans could not consent to this, but the surrender of German troops in Italy was too tempting for them to close the door on Wolff. The secret negotiation went on, with the decisive contribution of an Italian mediator, Baron Luigi Parrilli, knight of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta and cham-

¹⁷ ADSS, vol. 5, doc. 48, 146–47. Regarding the Holy See’s foreign policy during and after the war, see the valuable study by Di Nolfo, *Vaticano e Stati Uniti*.

¹⁸ The path to these negotiations opened up on 10 May 1944, when the plenipotentiary Karl Woldd and Pius XII met in secret in the Vatican. On Operation Sunrise, see Lanfranchi, *La resa degli ottocentomila*; Dollmann, *Un libero schiavo*; Aga-Rossi and Smith, *Operation Sunrise*; Adriano, *L'intrigo di Berna*.

berlain to His Holiness. German armies in Italy signed the capitulation in Caserta on 28 April 1945, and the road before the Anglo-Americans was clear to reach Trieste in haste and stop Tito's troops.

The German surrender saved thousands of human lives, and northern Italy was spared from destruction. Credit for Operation Sunrise's success went to Allen Dulles, and, years later, caused him to be appointed as director of the CIA. Yet the negotiations of Berne were a success for Karl Wolff, too. In exchange for the military surrender, he was able to secure from the victors a (covert) preferential treatment for all SS officials active in Italy. There were hundreds such officials—employed in the police service, secret services, and antipartisan military corps (the *Waffen-SS*)—who should have been arrested, tried, and sentenced for countless crimes. Instead, they were merely detained in interment camps for a time, much like the soldiers of the *Wehrmacht*. A few months later, as soon as they were released from custody, they started organizing, on Italian soil, the escape routes for war criminals wanted all over Europe.

The Vatican, too, did not fail to offer its support to escaping Nazis, Fascists, Ustasha, and former collaborators. The highest representatives of the Catholic Church believed the communist bloc would soon wage war against the capitalist bloc to take control of the world. Safeguarding Western civilization and Christian values, and taking back the eastern countries fallen under Bolshevik rule, would require a tremendous war effort. In this perspective, all those prepared to fight against communism, whatever their past, were assets that needed to be preserved.

PAVELIĆ IN AUSTRIA

After a long march through the Austrian mountains, toward the end of May 1945, Pavelić found refuge in Leingreith, near Kirchdorf in Tyrol, in a hunting lodge belonging to a nobleman from Salzburg. Pavelić's wife, daughters, and servants had set out on the journey before him,

and were waiting for him there. Leingreith lay in the American zone of occupation, about 20 kilometers from Salzburg, stronghold of the US armed forces in front of the Soviet zone, and seat of the 430th Counter Intelligence Corps.¹⁹ Most Ustasha notables who had followed Pavelić were in British-occupied Carinthia. Rather carelessly, a few of them had showed up before the British commanders, who had handed them over to Tito's military authorities. These were Nikola Mandić, former president of the NDH government, Pavao Canki, former religion and justice minister, Julije Makanec, former education minister, and Admiral Nikola Steinfl, former armed forces minister. Meanwhile, Mile Budak, former foreign affairs minister and Pavelić's right-hand man, Colonel Juco Rukavina, and a number of high officials had already fallen into the hands of the Yugoslav 2nd Army. They were all subjected to a summary trial before Zagreb's military court, which, on 6 June, sentenced Canki, Makanec, Budak, Steinfl, Mandić, and Rukavina to death. The other offenders were sentenced to prison time.²⁰

Other Ustasha hierarchs went into hiding in remote villages. Andrija Artuković, former interior minister of the NDH government and thus second on the Ustasha blacklist, was a guest of a German priest in the mountain village of Ebene Reichenau. Generals Ante Moškov and Vladimir Kren, two of Pavelić's faithful men, hid in the house of Reverend Alexander Motz, the parish priest of the village of Oberhof. Speaking in confidence, the priest referred to "a secret circular letter by the Holy See addressed to all Austrian parish priests, urging them to take in refugees with the greatest courtesy and to help them in every way possible."²¹ With a pass in hand obtained from a CIC

19 Regarding Salzburg's 430th CIC, see Milano and Brogan, *Soldiers, Spies and the Ratline*. Milano was at the head of the detachment from 1945 to 1950.

20 In 1947, Marshal Slavko Kvaternik, the former finance minister Vladimir Košak, the former foreign affairs minister Mehmed Alajbegović, the former president of the government Osman Kulenović, the former armed forces commander Miroslav Navratil, General Ivan Perčević, and the ambassador of the Reich, Siegfried Kasche, were also tried and sentenced to death.

21 This was Moškov's account (quoted in Krizman, *Pavelić u bjekstvu*, 132).

official in Salzburg, Artuković was able to move about freely, and thus to get back in touch with the other fugitives, whom he helped and supplied with documents. At the end of May, Moškov went to visit Pavelić in the residence of Lengreith. On his arrival, he found the *poglavnik* busy fishing for trout in a small lake. Pavelić told Moškov he'd just received a visit from an American colonel. According to Ante Moškov, in that same period, the *poglavnik* also wrote a memorial titled "Croatian Reality," in which he defended the work carried out by the Independent State of Croatia in behalf of the West, and committed to re-founding it.²² By offering his services to the Americans, Pavelić hoped to conquer Croatia once again, but meanwhile he was running serious risks. The Yugoslavs, through their representatives in the United Nations War Crimes Commission and military mission in Vienna, were pressuring the Anglo-Americans to arrest Ustasha criminals and hand them over to the rightful party in compliance with inter-Allied agreements. Further, they had started hunting Ustasha criminals independently, deploying a fair number of secret agents.

At the end of June 1945, Pavelić left Lengreith alone. For security reasons, not even his wife knew his whereabouts. According to reliable accounts, he stayed in Austria for a year, leading a monastic life. He let his beard grow out, wore glasses, and donned a tunic or a sackcloth habit to move from one hiding place to another. As he'd done in Italy during the time spent in isolation in Siena, he used people above suspicion as messengers to communicate with his men. Artuković, Balen, Kavran, and many others of the same ilk also found refuge in the monasteries of Carinthia and Tyrol on occasion, and could count on substantial means with which to finance their organization in this new clandestine phase.²³

²² Through the US services, a copy of this text would make it to Washington, DC.

²³ The convent of Friesach, an ancient town in Carinthia dear to the archbishop of Salzburg, was frequently visited by the Ustasha (Krizman, *Pavelić u bjekstvu*, 212). From Friesach, by way of the Carnic Alps, it was possible to reach Venice.

SUPPORT NETWORKS, AND USTASHA GOLD

In August 1943, Krunoslav Draganović had gone to Rome to carry out a diplomatic mission promoting the Croatian cause and a humanitarian mission, which consisted in repatriating 10,000 Croats interned in Italy. To this end, Draganović had activated an operational center in Rome, in the Pontifical Croatian College of St. Jerome, and a support network for internees entrusted to Croatian and Bosnian religious spread throughout Italian monasteries. The experience acquired aiding refugees would soon prove invaluable to the fleeing Ustasha.

Father Vilim Cecelja—a priest from Zagreb who had militated in the Ustasha organization since the days of King Alexander's dictatorship, and served as the military chaplain for the Ustasha militia under Pavelić's regime with the rank of lieutenant colonel—led a second humanitarian mission.²⁴ In May 1944, Father Cecelja moved to Vienna as the Croatian Red Cross representative, in order to take care of Croatian soldiers wounded in the war. In the spring of 1945, when the Red Army reached the gates of Vienna, Cecelja transferred the Austrian section of the Croatian Red Cross to Salzburg, and prepared to take in the fugitives. Equipped with an American pass, Father Cecelja was free to move about throughout the zone of occupation. His job was to supply people who'd lost their documents with new ones, the priest would relate many years later. He had blocks of Red Cross application forms and would leave Red Cross identification cards on all the fields, for fugitives to find and use. Arrested on 19 October 1945 by the 430th CIC for exploiting the Red Cross to protect Ustasha criminals at large, Cecelja spent eighteen months in prison. The Yugoslav government called for his extradition, but to no avail. Released in April 1947, Cecelja set back to work—carried out in his absence by his second-in-command, Vlad-

²⁴ Cecelja himself recounted taking the Ustasha oath before two candles, a crucifix, and a crossed sword and pistol, and that many Ustasha leaders who worked covertly met in his parish church in Zagreb. Further, in April 1942, he had led 800 peasants, who had fought alongside the Nazi invaders. See Aarons and Loftus, *Ratlines*, 101.

imir Bazilević—and continued supplying fugitives with money, food, lodging, and fake documents needed to travel from Austria to Italy.²⁵

Another clergyman, Reverend Karlo Petranović, took part in similar activities in the British zone of occupation. When the Ustasha had risen to power, Petranović was the curate of the Ogulin parish. Two months later, he'd become the military chaplain, and captain, of an Ustasha regiment charged with the ethnic cleansing of the Ogulin region. Early in 1945, he'd moved to Austria, where he was the guest of the bishop of Graz, Ferdinand Pawlikowski. When the Ustasha regime collapsed, Petranović helped refugees and fugitives, traveling back and forth between Graz and Trieste. Wanted by the Yugoslav government for the crimes committed in the area of Ogulin, he finally vanished into thin air at the end of that year.²⁶

At the time of the defeat, many Franciscans, priests, and Catholic dignitaries gravely compromised by involvement with the Ustasha regime in Croatia and Bosnia, or with the Nazi occupation in Slovenia, sought refuge in Austria. The archbishop of Sarajevo, Ivan Sarić, the bishop of Ljubljana, Gregorij Rožman, and the bishop of Banja Luka, Jozo Garić, were taken in by the bishopric of Klagenfurt, in the British zone. Rožman's arrival did not go unnoticed, however. The Yugoslav government immediately requested his extradition, in order to take him back to Ljubljana and try him there. London wanted to hand him over, for the evidence against him was irrefutable: he'd sided with the Nazi fascist occupiers using all of his influence, and even blessed the Slovenian National Guard, guilty of terrible crimes against the population. To prevent his extradition, the Holy See intervened through diplomacy to sway London and Washington, even sending Monsignor Draganović to Klagenfurt. The latter did everything he could to get Rožman a safe-conduct pass to reach the Brenner Pass from the British occupation authorities, but all his attempts failed. The British did

25 Aarons and Loftus, *Ratlines*, 103 and 104.

26 Ibid., 114–15. See also Casazza, *La fuga dei nazisti*, 97. We will encounter Petranović again in Genoa, where he acted as Draganović's trusted agent.

commit to preserving the Slovenian bishop's safety, however, and merely bound him to something of a forced residence in the diocese headquarters in Klagenfurt on the promise that he would not flee. A few months later, fearing Tito's constant pressure on London, and believing the Americans to be more trustworthy than the British, Rožman moved to Salzburg, where Archbishop Rohrerer greeted him.²⁷

An interesting consequence of Draganović's Austrian quest to save Rožman was his meeting with some Ustasha leaders, after which the reverend returned to Rome bearing 45 kilograms of gold divided into two packing cases, in the company of two fake priests: the former minister of agriculture, Stjepan Hefer, and the former general of the Ustasha militia, Vilko Pečnikar, Pavelić's son-in-law.²⁸

In four years of dictatorship, the Ustasha had amassed an enormous booty—gold and silver bars, bonds and money in sought-after currencies, gold coins and jewelry—stolen from Croatian banks or otherwise seized through the expropriation, extortion, and plundering that had gone hand in hand with the extermination of Serbs, Jews, and Romani. A significant portion of this ignoble fortune had been deposited in several Swiss banks. In May 1945, when the Ustasha government fled, Zagreb's coffers still held forty-six cases of gold bars and coins, jewelry and precious currency.²⁹ With the complicity of the Franciscan provincial Modesto Martinčić, thirty-two cases were concealed in the order's monastery in Zagreb, where they remained until 25 January 1946, when the Yugoslav police seized them.

The other fourteen cases were sent off to Austria on a truck escorted by Ustasha officials. An additional eighteen cases bearing a precious stamp collection from the Zagreb Post Directorate were dispatched

27 Many documents concerning Rožman and Draganović's mission may be found in Aarons and Loftus, *Ratlines*, 136–43. Making his way into Switzerland, in 1948, Gregorij Rožman got an immigration visa from the US consulate in Zurich, and moved to Cleveland, Ohio. Shortly afterward, Ivan Sarić followed suit, relocating to Madrid and keeping in close touch with Pavelić.

28 Jareb, *Zlato i novac Nezavisne Države izneseni u inozemstvo 1944 i 1945*, 353. Goni, *Operazione Odessa*, 260.

29 *Nazi Gold*, 241.

on another truck headed in the same direction. On 11 May 1945, already on Austrian ground, the convoy suffered a Soviet air attack, and the Ustasha quickly went into hiding, salvaging as much as possible of what they were carrying. Nothing more was ever known of the stamp collection, but eleven cases containing 250 kilograms of gold did reach the nearby Franciscan convent in Wolfsberg, where they remained concealed for two months. At the beginning of July, Draganović retrieved the two cases he was to take to Rome, and around the middle of the month, on Pavelić's mandate, Frane Šarić transferred the treasure to Radstadt, in the Salzburg district, under American occupation. Šarić himself, Ante Moškov, and Marko Čavić guarded the gold, which they moved from one hiding place to another, in Austria at first, and then in Italy. Čavić finally took at least 150 kilograms of gold to Argentina.³⁰

Viewed much like a gold reserve for the Ustasha government in exile, the treasure and funds deposited in Switzerland were administered with great frugality. Pavelić turned to other sources for the needs of his organization, availing himself, for example, of remittances from Croatian communities settled in the Americas, or earnings derived from financial speculation. Pavelić's banking consultant and treasurer was a Croatian Jew converted to Catholicism, Ivica Heinrich, who, after helping the *poglavnik* accumulate a fortune in Croatia, was able to make handsome earnings for him through investments in Hungary, in Switzerland, and, later, in South America. Heinrich's agents further multiplied the money exploiting the Croatian Red Cross and the committees set up in Austria and in Italy to bring relief to Croatian refugees. These humanitarian organizations were financed in dollars based on the official exchange rate, which in Austria, for example, was 1 dollar for 10 schillings. Yet a dollar actually yielded between 100 and 150 schillings on the black market; ten schillings went to each refugee, while the rest was funneled to the Ustasha organization.³¹ In the fall of 1946, after

30 Jareb, *Zlato i novac Nezavisne Države izneseni u inozemstvo 1944 i 1945*, 353–55.

31 Aaron and Loftus, *Ratlines*, 142.

Pavelić arrived in Italy, the US secret services estimated that the Usta-sha treasure transferred to Rome and held in the Vatican for safekeeping amounted to 200 million Swiss francs (equal to \$US47 million).³²

USTASHA AND SS MEMBERS ON THE MONASTERY ROAD

Ante Pavelić remained in Austria for about a year. His initial hope to regain control over Croatia within a few months was put to the test. The Anglo-Americans asked for information on the situation in Yugoslavia, but seemed in no hurry to take action. News of armed resistance in nearby Croatia was heard occasionally. Several units of the Usta-sha rearguard had apparently stayed on location, and were said to be organizing hotbeds of revolt. However, when one of Pavelić's emissaries slipped into Croatia from Hungary to reestablish contacts, he found that these were in fact small units hidden in the most remote and hard-to-reach areas of the country, lacking both connections with one another and hold on the population, and unable to launch any kind of guerrilla activity without outside support. In the winter of 1945–46, the Usta-sha military command started making arrangement to assist this clandestine resistance back at home. Yet it was clear that the undertaking would be neither easy nor brief. All of Yugoslavia was firmly under the control of Tito's army and police forces. As much as the Anglo-Americans wished to destabilize the nascent federation, they could not openly support an insurrection in a country placed under Soviet tutelage.

Pavelić started gradually transferring political personnel and a part of his military cadres, who would organize a second anti-Titoist front between Trieste and Tarvisio. Meanwhile, General Pečnikar and former minister Hefer had already arrived in Rome with Draganović in June 1945. Other notables followed suit shortly afterward. Early in July, former finance minister Dragutin Toth arrived in Venice, bear-

³² NARA, RG 226, Entry 183, Box 29, 1946, Letter from Bigelow to Glasser, 21 October 1946.

ing great means seized upon fleeing Croatia.³³ At the beginning of September, five Ustasha leaders passed through Venice on their way to Ancona, Bari, and Rome. They were Pavelić's trusted agent Nikola Badurina, the former Croatian consul in Ljubljana Salih Baljić, the former head of the Ustasha intelligence service, Zvonimir Malvić, and an unidentified man called Pavić.³⁴ Ustasha commander Ante Moškov made a first trip from Austria to Italy in October 1945, taking "twenty small gold bars" along; when he repeated the trip in August 1946 bearing "850 gold coins" and precious currency the British police arrested him in Venice.³⁵

According to British and American sources, Pavelić entered Italy in April 1946, accompanied by one Dragutin or Ante Došen, a former official of his bodyguard. Both of them were dressed like priests of the Roman Catholic Church.³⁶ Pavelić traveled disguised as Father Pedro Gonner, with a passport seemingly issued by the Spanish consulate in Milan.³⁷ He made a stop in Venice and another one in Florence, where he was able to visit his family members. Together with their maid, Angelina Fedeli, the latter had already settled into a villa in Fiesole owned by them. Then, "with his sack on his shoulder," Father Pedro reached Rome and found hospitality in the heart of Trastevere, "in a residence located in an extraterritorial part of the Vatican."³⁸

33 AMGOT, 10000/109/319, file "Croats in Italy, July '45–April '46," 5777.

34 AUSSME, RGPT, CE, 327, "Fuoriusciti croati in Italia," Nota del 5 settembre 1945, 296873. The former SS colonel Joseph Friedrich Rauch—who disappeared from Berlin shortly before the city was conquered along with the treasure of the Reichsbank, never to be found again—arrived in Buenos Aires in 1948 under the fake name of Juan Pavić (Casazza, *La fuga dei nazisti*, 67).

35 Krizman, *Pavelić u bjekstvu*, 128–29. Moškov deposited the gold in the Cassa di Risparmio of Conegliano Veneto; when the British police arrested him (he was on their blacklist), it retrieved the receipt of the deposit and confiscated the gold.

36 Aarons and Loftus, *Ratlines*, 86. Two other accounts provided by the Ustasha place Pavelić's arrival in Italy between June and September 1946. See: Radelić, *Križari*, 48; Goni, *Operazione Odessa*, 439–40; Jareb, *Zlato i novac Nezavisne Države izneseni u inozemstvo 1944 i 1945*, 320.

37 In the spring of 1945, the secret services of the SS under Colonel Rauff's command had stolen stubs and stamps from the Spanish consulate in Milan, and were thus able to produce nearly perfect counterfeit Spanish passports (see Adriano, *L'intrigo di Berna*, 92).

38 Foà, "Intervista a Ante Pavelić a Montevideo."

As for the roads many Nazis, Ustasha, and their collaborators traveled across the Alps, reaching Rome or Genoa, and fleeing abroad from there, following in Pavelić's footsteps, it would be wrong to speak of a single escape route. Multiple starting points existed, as well as multiple points of entry along the border. Nevertheless, very little was left to chance or improvisation. As proven by many firsthand accounts, investigations, and reconstructions, fugitives could count on a support network spread throughout Italy for protection and shelter.

Alfred Jarschel, a Nazi turned journalist and author under the name of Werner Brockdorff, gave one such account.³⁹ A former Hitlerjugend (Hitler Youth) instructor and fighter on the Russian Front, where he'd been injured, Jarschel returned to Germany in 1943, and served as a courier for the SS secret services. During the last days of the Battle of Berlin, he found himself at the head of 300 youths, called upon to make a last attempt at defending the chancellery and Hitler's bunker. When everything went up in flames, he eluded the Russians and handed himself over to the Americans, who interned him. A few months later, to avoid what he believed to be an unjust sentence, Jarschel escaped from the Berlin camp, and set out south.⁴⁰ Lacking documents and wanted by the CIC, he joined two dozen other refugees who were headed toward the Alps. The group spent a month in a hut in the massif of the Schoenfeldalm. It later moved into the Austrian zone under French control, where surveillance was less strict, and up to Obergurgl, a Tyrolean village high in the mountains. On 23 December 1945, the party trekked across the Ötztal Alps alongside an Austrian guide, and descended into the Passeier Valley, where it was greeted "by two German friends who arrived from Milan, and by a Jesuit father, who took care

39 Brockdorff, *Flucht vor Nuernberg*. On the author's reliability, acknowledged by Simon Wiesenthal, too, see Sereny, *In quelle tenebre*, 394.

40 In the summer of 1945, Jarschel had been tried in absentia by an Allied commission, and sentenced to twenty years in jail for the murder of a British pilot. In 1956, while he was still in exile, he was able to get a retrial, and was acquitted for not having committed the act (Brockdorff, *Flucht vor Nuernberg*, 44–46).

of the fugitives giving them shelter in a chapel.⁴¹ In the following days, the refugees were taken in small groups to a convent in Merano. Then, at the end of January 1946—by which time the number of refugees had increased to about fifty—a priest took them to Milan by train. At the central station, two different German friends took them into custody and guided them to the suburb of San Cristoforo, on the Ripa Ticinese, where other fugitives had already been lodged in a public housing complex. A few weeks later, Jarschel was summoned to Castel Solaro, a large farm on the nearby hill of Ronchetto, where the former SS colonel Walter Rauff—a key figure within the Nazi network in Italy—met with each fugitive individually.⁴² Jarschel found Rauff “in the company of a Jesuit priest, who, judging from his accent, seemed to be Austrian.” The two listened to his account, verified it in light of the information in their possession, and finally proposed putting his experience as a courier at the service of the organization. As proof of the commitment, Jarschel received a payment and a passport, and a few days later left on a mission to Genoa: he had “a delicate message” he was personally to deliver “to one Draganović.”⁴³ For a year, Jarschel traveled back and forth between Milan, Genoa, and Rome. When he was in the company of German fugitives deserving special consideration, the security detail was generally made up of Ustasha, and occasionally included some Fascists. In the spring of 1947, he had to leave Milan for security reasons. A German priest went to pick him up in an old Fiat,

41 Brockdorff, *Flucht vor Nuernberg*, 52.

42 Colonel Walter Rauff had given a significant contribution to the Final Solution by inventing the gas van, in which prisoners inhaled the vehicle's exhaust fumes, dying of asphyxiation as a result. In September 1943, now inspector general for security services in Northern Italy, Rauff established his command in Milan. In the course of Operation Sunrise, he collaborated on the Swiss negotiations between Wolff and Dulles, further carrying out negotiations with the Resistance in Milan. After the German surrender, he was interned in the camp in Rimini with the security police (SD) officials and agents that had worked following his orders. During the winter, Rauff vanished for a time, subsequently reappearing in Milan with a new identity and retaking possession of huge amounts of gold and sought-after currencies he'd stashed away. Rauff's best agents also escaped from the camps and returned to his command, laying out the network extending from the Alpine huts to the ports from which ships set off for the Middle East and for South America.

43 Brockdorff, *Flucht vor Nuernberg*, 68 and 70.

and took him to a convent. That same evening, together with the German priest and six other fugitives disguised as friars, he took a train to Rome. He remained in the convent of Santa Maria dell'Anima—annexed to the Collegium Germanicum directed by the Austrian bishop Alois Hudal—for a time along with other comrades.⁴⁴ Jarschel was to commit his story to paper sparing no details, and spent a few weeks in spiritual retreat under the guidance of a German Jesuit. Upon passing these tests, he took off for the Middle East, where he found a position as a military instructor.

Between 1945 and 1948, thousands of fugitives reached Italy and left for faraway countries following Jarschel's same route, or a very similar one. This particular escape route was called "Klosterweg" by the Nazis, "Manastirska Cesta" by the Ustasha, "La Via dei Conventi" by Italian investigators, and "Monastery Road" by American ones.⁴⁵ Divided by nationality or combined in a same group, Germans, Austrians, Croats, and all manner of collaborators traveled the Monastery Road, following the path set by the three masterminds behind the extraction, namely, the former SS colonel Walter Rauff, Monsignor Krunoslav Draganović, and the Austrian bishop Alois Hudal.

44 Bishop Hudal, a supporter of the Anschluss and an admirer of Hitler, was of great help to the fleeing Nazis. In 1948, when he turned to Perón, requesting entry visas for Argentina for 3,000 Germans and 2,000 Austrians, he clarified that they were not refugees, but "soldiers who had fought against Bolshevism," further adding that it was thanks to their "sacrifice" that Europe was free. See: Sanfilippo, "Los papeles de Hudal."

45 These tags appear in hundreds of documents and accounts from that time. Regarding the escape routes, particularly in the area of the Brenner Pass, see the recent and very well documented work by Gerald Steinacher, *La via segreta dei nazisti*.

Camps and Monasteries: the Ustasha Return to Italy

REFUGEES AND WAR CRIMINALS

Immediately after the Second World War ended, millions of human beings were dragged into a new collective tragedy, devastating in its social impacts and rife in long-term consequences. In an attempt to build homogeneous national states, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States sponsored the relocation of entire national groups in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In no roundabout way, Winston Churchill declared “there [would] be no mixture of population to cause endless trouble” in Central and Eastern Europe. The agreements signed by the three great powers in attendance at the Potsdam Conference in August 1945 were euphemistically described as “resettlements” and “population exchanges,” but they were in fact forced transfers. About 12 million Germans were expelled from Poland, Czechoslovakia (most prominently the Sudeten Germans), Hungary, Romania, and Yugoslav Vojvodina. About 2 million Poles were expelled from the Soviet Union and from Soviet-occupied Germany; 700,000 Ukrainians were driven out of southeastern Poland, and the latter country’s borders were moved some 200 kilometers to the west, with the consequent division of eastern Galicia among Soviet Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania. Thousands of Hungarians were expelled from Yugoslavia, Slovakia, and Romania, while Slovaks had to leave Hungary.¹ Silent throngs of

1 Kramer, “Introduction,” 7 and 15.

people mournfully left their homes, jobs, friends, and established relationships behind for an uncertain future in a foreign land. These forced transfers occurred in a state of overcrowding, food shortage, and poor sanitation, with all kinds of violence taking place along the way. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe, already riddled with prison camps, were now being filled with refugee camps.

Most of these facilities were administered by the UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration), an agency founded by the UN in 1943, while a smaller number of them were controlled by Allied personnel or by the authorities of individual countries. In the course of 1947, as the UNRRA exhausted its funds, the management of dozens of camps throughout Europe was entrusted to the IRO (International Refugee Organization), a new agency specifically set up by the UN to deal with these matters.

The Holy See played an important part in assisting internees, particularly in Italian camps. Indeed, the Vatican had gone to great lengths to help the victims during the war as well, working in close collaboration with the International Red Cross. In January 1945, in aid of refugees, displaced persons, returnees, and prisoners of war, Pius XII instituted the Pontifical Commission for Assistance (PCA) under Monsignor Ferdinando Baldelli's presidency. The PCA offered material assistance to all those in need in the form of food, clothing, medicine and subsidies, fruit of generous donations from the United States.² Chaplains and nuns of various nationalities were present in the camps, ensuring that refugees received spiritual care, while also providing the Vatican with a clear understanding of specific circumstances and general problems. Ubiquitous in Italy, the PCA's relief network extended to countries such as Germany and Austria, particularly affected by the wave of refugees coming from Eastern Europe.

² The two American organizations that gathered resources in Italy's behalf were American Relief for Italy, presided over by Myron Taylor, and the National Catholic Welfare Conference, which answered to the US Catholic hierarchy (see *La Civiltà Cattolica* IV [1945]: 23–35, Cavalli S.I., *La Pontificia Commissione*).

More than thirty camps existed in Italy, in Naples (Bagnoli), Bari, Rome (Cinecittà), Bologna, Cremona, Modena, Reggio Emilia, Rimini, Fermo and several other locations. In truth, very different facilities were being called camps. Some were used for the internment of former Axis soldiers before the Allied authorities repatriated them. Others provided shelter to proper refugees, such as those hailing from Central and Eastern Europe, or to Italians fleeing Africa, Istria, and the islands of the Kvarner Gulf. Refugees and former soldiers guilty of petty crimes—theft, extortion, involvement with contraband and the black market—were detained in still other camps, such as those located in Fraschette (Alatri) and in Fossoli.³

Ustasha war criminals, former public functionaries of the Independent State of Croatia and other collaborators who arrived in Italy dispersed in the multitude of refugees ended up in camps of all the kinds described above, or found individual accommodations. At the end of 1946, the Croatian community in Italy was estimated to comprise between 10,000 and 12,000 people. In addition to Croats, Serbs and Slovenes had arrived, too, and by 1947 the British authorities estimated that the overall Yugoslav colony in Italy exceeded 23,000 people. In many camps, the cohabitation was made difficult by the heterogeneity of the internees, who often indulged in acts of intemperance. To avoid friction, the Allied authorities proceeded to classify all camp residents, and decided to make some transfers. Thus, Serbian and Montenegrin nationalists remained in Trani and Eboli, whereas the Ustasas were concentrated in the camp located in Monte Urano (Fermo).⁴

The internees in Fermo were prevailingly former Ustasha soldiers, but among them were also civilian functionaries who had served in the independent state's administration, Peasant Party activists, and their families. Before the Allied authorities, the Ustasha loved to present

3 Sanfilippo, "Fughe e passaggi dai campi del dopoguerra."

4 Many documents mistakenly claim the camp was located in Servigliano, confusing the facility that housed the Croats with the one used for a long time to accommodate refugees from Istria, Dalmatia, and the islands of the Kvarner Gulf. On the history of the camp in Servigliano, see Ieranò, *Baracca* n. 6.

themselves as the victims of political persecution, and as having escaped the revenge of the communists who had seized power in Yugoslavia. In fact, many were war criminals—like Ljubo Miloš, responsible for the extermination of thousands of Serbs, Jews, and Romani—concealed behind false identities. To be sure, the Ustashas detained in Fermo made up a community of diehards. In April 1946, the Ustashas celebrated what would have been the anniversary of the Independent State of Croatia's establishment for three days. They waved flags, displayed portraits of Pavelić, and engaged in brawls with the Peasant Party activists present in the camp. A month later, taking advantage of the Allies' leniency, the Ustasha choir left the camp and went to Rome to perform a concert in the Palace of the Propagation of the Faith. Draganović had even made arrangements for the event to be broadcast by radio, but the communist and socialist press reacted so vehemently—among other things, accusing the choir director of having personally directed executions of Serbs in Croatia—that the Vatican Radio was forced to change plans.⁵

Traditional intranational strife was not the only thing dividing the Yugoslavs in Italy. Profound ideological differences within national communities also existed. While all groups shared a deep-seated enmity toward communism, and the will to fight against Titoism, the refugees and their respective parties otherwise expressed very different political convictions. The Croatian community was divided between the Ustasha and the supporters of Maček, who had abandoned Croatia together with Ivan Pernar, Josip Torbar, and Josip Reberski. Maček had settled in Paris, while the other three had gone to Rome, where they'd suffered for the predominance of fellow Croats hailing from the Ustasha camp and for their own lack of ties with the Vatican (their party had always been secular in nature, and sometimes downright anticlerical).⁶

5 AUSSME, Fondo Calderini, 1946, b. 163, Attività degli ustascia. Le provocazioni degli ustascia.

6 On the history of the Croatian Peasant Party, see: Boban, *Maček i politika Hrvatske seljačke stranke 1928–1941*; Jelić-Butić, *Hrvatska seljačka stranka*; Bilandžić, *Hrvatska moderna povijest*, 68–189.

Slovenes made up the smallest community. They identified with the Slovene People's Party, traditionally divided between a conservative and anticommunist right, backed by Catholic Action groups, and a more progressive Christian socialist wing. During the Second World War, the greater part of the People's Party, under Miha Krek's leadership, had openly collaborated with Mussolini first, and with Hitler later. Tried in Ljubljana in the second half of 1945, Krek was sentenced in absentia for collaborating with the invader. The Slovenian politician was already in Italy, however, where he enjoyed high-profile support and was able to set up a committee in exile, which became the point of reference for the Slovenian community. Krek believed the Anglo-Americans would never allow communism to reach the shores of the Adriatic, and was therefore persuaded he could gather international support for his political project to create an independent Slovenia with Trieste as its capital.⁷

Serbian émigrés presented a more composite picture. While most of them had nationalist leanings, and were faithful to the royal government in exile in London and to General Mihailović's Chetniks, some were democrats, some were social democrats, and some were pro-Nazis. The former Chetnik commander Dobroslav Jevđević had been living in Italy since the end of 1943.⁸ After Rome was liberated, thanks to subsidies obtained from the Yugoslav legation in the Vatican, Jevđević had established armed bands in Julian Venetia. Upon the Allies' arrival, he'd handed himself over to the British, along with about a thousand of his men, who were later interned in the camp in Eboli. Jevđević had a great influence on the ultranationalist segment of the Serbian community, and in mid-1946 was able to organize a demonstration in Eboli

7 AUSSME, Fondo Calderini, 1946, b. 22, Elementi slavi e croati residenti a Roma. Krek was on great terms with the Vatican through the intercession of Monsignor Anton Prešeren, the assistant general of the Jesuits and a fellow Slovene. Further, he managed to establish close ties with the Allied hierarchy.

8 A lawyer, large landowner, and former member of Belgrade's Skupština, Jevđević had been a representative of Mihailović's Chetniks with the Italian army up to 8 September 1943, after which time he'd entered Italy and offered his services to the German political police in Rome.

against the trial Mihailović was undergoing in Belgrade.⁹ In addition to Mihailović, who was promptly executed, Jevđević himself was tried in absentia and sentenced to death. The announcement of Mihailović's death came as a big shock to the Chetnik community in Italy, and coincided with Petar Živković's arrival in Rome. Thanks to his authority and prestige, Živković was one of the few who could help resolve the disagreements that poisoned relationships among Yugoslavs in Italy.¹⁰ The Yugoslav colony offered him the direction of the anticommunist movement, but his permanence in Rome was riddled with difficulties. Pursued by agents of the Yugoslav secret police, Živković was frequently forced to change his residence, until finally he left Italy for Paris, where he died in February 1947 following a serious illness.

USTASHA HIERARCHS AND MONASTERIES

The Ustasha had at least two good reasons to seek shelter in Italy. Many party leaders and a fair number of midrank officers had spent long periods of time there between 1930 and 1941, developing a good knowledge of places and people. Furthermore, Rome was the seat of an ancient and powerful Croatian religious institution able to provide them with material help: the Pontifical Croatian College of St. Jerome, founded in the sixteenth century on the banks of the Tiber for purposes of charity and study, and which also served as a link between the Vatican and the Croatian Church currently led by Archbishop Stepinac.¹¹ In 1941, when the Independent State of Croatia was born, the institute had taken a position of open collaboration with the Ustasha hierarchy. Henceforth,

9 MAE, AP 1946–1950, Jugoslavia, 1946, b. 1, communication no. 2572/189, *Dimostrazione di jugoslavi per Mihailović*.

10 A leading political figure alongside King Alexander, Živković represented Mihailović in King Peter's ministerial cabinet in exile in London during the war. Once in Italy, Živković got in touch with Ivan Pernar to lay the groundwork for an agreement between the Croatian Peasant Party and the Serbian parties, in order to form a Yugoslav government in exile. See: Archivio Fondazione Gramsci, PCI, Materiale vario, mf 0244, 2626.

11 See Bogdan, *Papinski Hrvatski Zavod Svetog Jeronima*; Tumpic, "Il Collegio di San Girolamo nell'Urbe," 271–82.

the young priests who arrived to complete their studies in the pontifical college were, without exception, Croats of proven Ustasha faith.

St. Jerome's rector was Monsignor Juraj Madjerec, but it was Krunoslav Draganović—the institute's secretary since the end of 1943—who turned it into a crucial center for the Ustasha. With his proverbial discretion, the secretary took in fleeing Ustasha leaders, and coordinated the anti-Yugoslav conspiratorial activity. Three separate organizations were active within the college: St. Jerome's Confraternity, Zagreb's Refectory, and the Croatian Committee for Refugees. The first one assisted Croatian refugees in Italy, for instance by sending generous monthly subsidies to the refugee camp in Fermo, where more than a thousand Ustashes were interned.¹² The refectory offered free meals to roughly 70 Ustashes each day, and was a meeting place for fugitives arriving in Rome from a number of Italian regions and from Austria. Finally, the refugees committee was something of a political representation of Croatian émigrés. Early in 1946, in order to give this body the appearance of an institution representative of the entire exiled Croatian community, two Peasant Party members, Ante Budimirović and Josip Reberski, were co-opted to serve in the committee's board. The Ustasha component remained hegemonic, though.

All these activities required large sums of money. Catholic organizations, American parishes, and the Vatican had been funding the pontifical college since before this time. Yet only when the first Ustasha hierarchs arrived in mid-1945, bearing cases full of gold, did it become possible to set in motion the complex organizational machine that helped internees in refugee camps, published papers and journals, and organized the flight of Ustasha war criminals to the Americas. Draganović's control on a part of the treasures stolen by the Ustasha in Zagreb contributed to turning him into the pivot of Croatian emigration, and won him the label of "golden priest."

Once in Italy, after spending a little time at St. Jerome's, middle- and high-ranking Ustasha leaders were hidden within churches, mon-

¹² AUSSME, Fondo Calderini, 1946, b. 345, *Memoriale redatto da personalità croata*.

asteries, abbeys, and colleges. At the end of 1945, Vladimir Kren—the former commander general of the air force of the Independent State of Croatia, wanted by the Yugoslav government as a war criminal—was being held in the camp in Grumo, near Bari, under a false identity. When he managed to get out after a few months, he prompted his wife, interned in Fermo, to reach him in Rome. On his arrival at St. Jerome's, the college must have been crawling with Ustasha, for Krunoslav told him rather brusquely “he was up to his neck” and had “a great many Ustasha on his hands in need of placement in the monasteries.” However, he did direct him to the Convent of the Sisters of Charity, in Centocelle, some of whose residents were Croatian and Slovenian nuns. Mr. and Mrs. Kren found hospitality there, for 300 lire a day.¹³ At the time, twenty Croatian refugees—former ministers, former ambassadors, and journalists, their respective families, and a few priests—were sojourning in the guesthouse. Even Roko Faget, one of Jasenovac's commanders, was a guest in Centocelle before moving to Grottaferata.¹⁴ Three months later, Kren could no longer sustain his boarding fees. Draganović found him a place in a Trappist monastery on the Via Laurentina, in the Tre Fontane Abbey. Almost entirely subject to the rules of cloistered life, the monastery was ideal for a peaceful stay—a place far removed from the risk of arrest by Allied or Italian authorities, and from the specter of falling into the hands of Yugoslavia. Kren arrived in July 1946 and, unable to afford the boarding fee, he worked in the abbey's vineyard during the summer and in its warehouse during the winter in exchange for room and board.¹⁵ He remained until February 1947. Then, as he was getting ready to leave for Argentina, he stumbled on the British police.

The writer Vinko Nikolić, the hierarch Mirko Eterović, and a dozen other Ustashes were hiding in the heart of Rome, in the College of St.

¹³ HDA, SDS-RSUP-SRH, kutnja 46. sig. 013.1.17, Zapisnik saslušanja Vladimira Krena; Krizman, *Pavelić u bjekstvu*, 208.

¹⁴ *Repubblica*, 26.9.1948, Foti, *Il comando generale...*

¹⁵ Krizman, *Pavelić u bjekstvu*, 210.

Paul alla Regola, run by the Third Order Regular of St. Francis. Another Franciscan convent located in Via Merulana, the Antonianum, housed some Ustashas from Herzegovina. General Matija Čanić, commander of the Croatian Armed Forces in the final stage of the conflict, was in a Dominican convent. General Fedor Dragojlov spent time in the Institute of the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother in Borgo Santo Spirito, which provided lodging to pilgrims who had arrived to visit St. Peter's.¹⁶ "To arrange for our settlement in the convents," Kren would later confess, "Draganović relied on the support of a cardinal who gave out instructions to the generals of the various orders, all of which depended on him."¹⁷

The fleeing Ustasha found a haven even in religious houses outside the capital. Vjekoslav Vrančić and Stjepo Perić hid in Roseto degli Abruzzi, in the summer residence of the Russicum Pontifical College.¹⁸ After spending some time in the camp in Fermo, General Rubčić went into hiding in the monastery of the Capuchin friars in Viterbo, whereas Colonel Ivan Štir was a guest of Mont'Albano, Guidonia, in the monastery church of St. Michael.¹⁹

The presence of so many Croats in Italy and their comings and goings between monasteries, colleges, and religious institutions could not go unnoticed, even at a time of great confusion for the existence of dozens of camps filled with hundreds of thousands of refugees. Toward the end of 1946, the US Department of State charged the official Vincent La Vista with carrying out an investigation on war criminals harbored among refugees in Italy, and on the organizations that aided their flight from the country. La Vista, who had already collaborated on top-secret investigations concerning fascist spy cells active in America, as well as the commercial, financial, and industrial relations between Italy and

16 MSPS, Fond PA, f. 55, d. 17, sign. b. 45209, 16 April 1947.

17 Krizman, *Pavelić u bjekstvu*, 216. The cardinal Draganović referred to was probably Pietro Fumasoni Biondi, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith and Protector of the Pontifical Croatian College of St. Jerome.

18 AUSSME, Fondo Calderini, 1947, 88091/88101-11, Pavelić Ante, Elena Pinto.

19 Krizman, *Pavelić u bjekstvu*, 220.

Germany,²⁰ set to work for a few months, deploying his agents to infiltrate refugee communities, several monasteries, and the Pontifical Commission for Assistance. His inquiry was the subject of a long report sent to Washington in May 1947. The picture was clear: in Rome, the Pontifical Commission for Assistance had no fewer than ten offices divided by nationality providing aid to refugees and criminals from their respective countries. To acquire new documents from the International Red Cross, refugees need not prove their identity, but merely present a letter (an affidavit) written by one of the “national” offices of the PCA bearing a Vatican seal. Through this procedure, many criminals or suspected criminals (coded black and gray, respectively) had already taken flight using new identities, or were about to leave Europe.²¹

During those same months, the special agent of the US Counter Intelligence Corps Clayton Mudd was likewise conducting meticulous work, of which he informed his higher-ups. The Ustasha in Italy, Mudd wrote, could count on an effective clandestine network spreading out from monastery to monastery along the Grumo–Rome–Venice–Trieste–Ljubljana–Zagreb route. These monasteries, in which Croatian friars lived, served as transit stations and safe houses for the Ustasha. Mudd claimed with absolute certainty that the pivot of all “the intelligence and operational work” was the Pontifical College of St. Jerome, in Rome.²²

Italian intelligence services identified another network of monasteries. This one had its headquarters in the Antonianum in Bolzano, not far from the Brenner Pass, the entry point into Italy for thousands of refugees and many Nazi fugitives. From here, candidates for expatriation continued their journey to the port of Genoa, or to Rome. In Rome, they reached the Salvatorian monastery in Via della Conciliazione 51, the Pallotine monastery in Via Pettinari, or the German College of Our Lady of the Soul in Via della Pace.²³ Monsignor Hudal—

²⁰ Aarons and Loftus, *Ratlines*, 50.

²¹ United States National Archives (henceforth USNA), RG 59, Decimal file, 1945–1949, Box 4080, Dossier La Vista, Illegal emigration movements in and through Italy, 15 May 1947, 11.

²² USNA, RG 319, US Army file on Ante Pavelić, Robert Clayton Mudd, 30 January 1947.

²³ AUSSME, Fondo Calderini, 1948, 360–328628–328696, Attività dei frati francescani in

the grand protector of Austrian and German Nazis—served as the latter institute's rector.

A nonnegligible number of Ustasha hierarchs, all of them on the list of war criminals, lived outside the monasteries and refugee camps, in civil dwellings. Ivo Herenčić had his lodgings near Porta Pia, and led a rather comfortable life selling art to the Americans. Joso Rukavina resided in Centocelle, made his living selling watches, and continued to plan insurrectional activities in Yugoslavia. Vilko Pečnikar, who had married Pavelić's daughter, was living with a Roman family; he was in touch with the whole Ustasha community in Italy, collaborated with Ivan Oršanić and Ante Cividini, and sometimes met with Dido Kvaternik in the Trattoria Torrette, near St. Jerome's. For a living, Pečnikar trafficked in stolen goods, or went to Northern Italy and purchased goods from British officers at the camps that were being shut down in order to resell them on the black market.²⁴

ON THE TRACKS OF THE *POGLAVNIK*

Ante Pavelić was one of the top names on the blacklist of fleeing criminals. In a report from January 1947, a CIC investigator claimed to have identified his hiding place in an extraterritorial property enclosed by walls on the left bank of the Tiber, above the Aventine riverfront. The compound housed four religious institutions: the Dominican Monastery of St. Sabina, the St. Alessio School for Roman Studies, the Grand Priorate of Rome of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, and the Benedictine Monastery of St. Anselmo. The compound, the report said, was perched above the Aventine Hill, reputed to be riddled with underground tunnels connecting individual buildings. The US agent was convinced that Pavelić was hiding in the Monastery of St. Sabina.²⁵

Bolzano, ottobre 1948.

²⁴ Krizman, *Pavelić u bjekstvu*, 213.

²⁵ USNA, RG 319, Intelligence and Investigative Dossier, 1939–1976, Box 173, Subject: Ante Pavelić, 22 January 1947.

In those same days, another CIC agent, Clayton Mudd, reported that Pavelić's name was at the top of the list of collaborators that the Department of State and Foreign Office had decided to turn in to the Yugoslavs for trial. The Ustasha leader, the US agent explained, was not an ordinary criminal, but a political criminal. Through the press, the Yugoslav government had repeatedly accused the Anglo-Americans of hiding Pavelić for their own future purposes. Every effort should therefore be made to capture and turn him in to the Yugoslav government, so that he might stand trial. This would put an end to Yugoslav propaganda, and convince the local population of the falsehood of said propaganda.²⁶ However, bringing war criminals to justice was no short order. Brigadier Fitzroy Maclean, who was pursuing wanted criminals on behalf of the British government, complained about the great obstacles he faced. Indeed, émigré and Catholic organizations thwarted his efforts to locate criminals.²⁷

Pavelić was certainly aware of the Allies' efforts to pursue him, as the frequency with which he changed his hideouts proves. As Pavelić himself recounted years later, in Rome at first he'd been a guest in a crowded house located "in an extraterritorial area of the Vatican." Subsequently, he'd moved to Castel Gandolfo, "in the residence of a countess where a Romanian minister was also being accommodated." Back in Rome, he'd rented a room in the city center, in the apartment of "a retired high police official," who, despite having served as his police escort in the past, had not recognized him.²⁸

In July 1947, a CIC report pointed to a new hiding place located at 17 Via Giacomo Venezian, in a Vatican building protected by extraterritoriality.²⁹ The Italian counterespionage department had been more

²⁶ USNA, RG 319, US Army file on Ante Pavelić, Robert Clayton Mudd, 30 January 1947.

²⁷ MSPS, Fond PA, 1947, f. 64, d. 13, sign. b. 49275, 20 May 1947.

²⁸ Foà, "Intervista a Ante Pavelić a Montevideo." Pavelić did not mention the high official's name, but his guard and protector during the ten years of his first stay in Italy had been the public security inspector Ercole Conti.

²⁹ USNA, RG 319, Records of the Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, G 2, Intelligence and Investigative Dossier, 1939–1976, Box 173, Subject: Ante Pavelić, July 1947.

zealous than the American one, it would seem, for the same address appeared in a report dated February 1947, which further stated that the Soviet services were also seeking the Croatian dictator.³⁰

Thus, everyone was looking for Pavelić, though for different reasons. The UDBA (Uprava Državne Bezbednosti), the Yugoslav secret police, wanted to seize the Croatian dictator to eliminate a dangerous enemy of the people. Americans wanted to track Pavelić for more complex reasons. It's probably worth remembering that the relations between the United States and Yugoslavia had seriously deteriorated between 1946 and 1947. The clash had started over Trieste's fate. The Anglo-Americans intended to assign the city to Italy, but Tito was bent on getting it for his own country, and forced the Soviets to carry out long and exhausting negotiations with the Western powers. When the Yugoslavs nationalized all foreign properties, including assets owned by American and British investors, the contention spread to the sphere of economy, causing strong protests in Washington and London. Finally, in the summer of 1946, after repeated US violations of Yugoslav airspace for intimidation purposes, the Yugoslav army brought two American cargo planes to the ground. After these incidents, which froze relations with the United States, came the end of UNRRA aid to Yugoslavia, motivated by the fact that Belgrade had been diverting a large part of the provisions meant for the population to the army. What's more, international bank organizations stopped issuing loans to Yugoslavia.

Following these events, American interest in Pavelić increased, as US authorities started to think about a possible use for him in the region. But, as is often the case when it comes to secret services, the agencies did not work in concert. Allied intelligence officials had helped Pavelić in Austria, further facilitating his passage to Italy, where CIC agents—busy at work hunting war criminals down, and unaware of

30 AUSSME, Fondo Calderini, 1948, 88100, Pavelić Ante, 14 February 1947. While in hiding in Rome, Pavelić found the time to write his memoirs, later collected and published by his daughter Visnja, who settled in Zagreb in 1994 with help from Franjo Tuđman: Pavelić, *Doživljaji*.

their colleagues' doings—anxiously sought out his hiding place. Finally, the need to cover Pavelić's flight prevailed, and the order arrived from Washington to suspend the search. On the warrant calling for Pavelić's immediate arrest, a functionary penned a handwritten note in the margin indicating new instructions, dated 14 July 1947, to abstain from such an arrest.³¹ Another element contributed to this decision, however. With the onset of the Cold War, American espionage agencies started recruiting many Ustasha fugitives as agents and informers by virtue of their anticommunism. If Pavelić had been arrested, their willingness to work with the United States could have been compromised.³²

In a deposition made before the Yugoslav authorities many years later, Monsignor Draganović also provided some details on Pavelić's hideouts:

In Italy, he changed residence seven or eight times. I only know three or four of his hideouts. These places didn't always belong to the Church. He spent time in Castel Gandolfo, too, where the pope's summer residence was, but in the house of an Italian aristocrat, a count who owned a villa there. [...] For a time, Pavelić hid in Vatican extraterritorial property in Rome. He spent a few months there—three months, let's say. [...] It was a building in Trastevere. It was probably where some congregations had their headquarters.

Subsequently, according to Draganović, "Pavelić spent time in a Jesuit house in Naples. This was probably ten months before he left Italy."³³

³¹ USNA, RG 319, Records of the Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, G 2, Box 173, CIC Headquarters to CIC Agent, Zone 5, Subject: Ante Pavelić, 7 July 1947.

³² Slany, *U.S. and Allied Wartime and Postwar Relations and Negotiations*, 150.

³³ HDA, RSUP-SRH-SDS, 001.14, Istražni zapisnik Krunoslava Draganovića, 22–23. The Vatican compound in question is the palace for the missions of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in Trastevere. The main entrance is in Piazza di San Callisto, while the back looks out on Via Giacomo Venezian.

The Ustasha community in the camp in Fermo also gave Pavelić its support, preparing a memorial and requesting an audience with the pope. The latter met with the engineer Horvat, one-time dean of the University of Zagreb, and with the director of the camp in Dušan Žanko, both of whom explicitly called on him to help the *poglavnik*. According to Draganović, the pope answered thus: “I pray God the situation is solved somehow. I’ve been told—I mean by Marconi [Abbot Marcone]—that Pavelić is a good Catholic, though it must be noted that many have a very poor opinion of him. Personally, I think him a Christian. [...] If anyone consults me, I shall say what I believe. As much as possible, I will support him [and] if I can do anything good for him I will.”³⁴

THE YUGOSLAVS’ ANTICOMMUNIST ACTIVITY

Groups and parties of all Yugoslav nationalities carried out intense anticomunist activity while in Italy, in an attempt to overthrow the new Yugoslav regime. To this end, they published pamphlets and papers, conducted espionage and contraband, and sent men and weapons to Yugoslavia. The Ustashes were especially active. They set up an editorial office for *The Croatian Word* (*Hrvatska Riječ*) in their headquarters in the Pontifical Croatian College of St. Jerome, and started publishing the paper on 1 June 1946.³⁵ Printed by mimeograph machine in the Vatican Polyglot Press, the paper was written in Croat, and was between eight and ten pages long. The Ustasha circulated it in Rome, in Trieste, and in all refugee camps. Laced with ritual exhortations to resistance, the paper promised Croatia’s liberation from communists, and systematically vilified Serbs, envisaging a civil war between the two Slav peoples.³⁶ Other Ustasha papers—such as *Velebit*, printed in

34 HDA, RSUP-SRH-SDS, 001.14, Istražni zapisnik Krunoslava Draganovića, 19

35 AUSSME, Fondo Calderini, 1946, b. 345, Memoriale redatto da personalità croata.

36 Ibid., Attività politica degli ustascia croati in Roma e Firenze. Relazione Centro C.S. di Udine, 5 October 1946.

the refugee camp in Bagnoli and edited by Osvald Toth, and *Croatia Press*, printed in Madrid and edited by the engineer Karlo Mirth—were similar in intent.

The Croatian Peasant Party was no less determined in its anticommunist efforts. Toward the end of 1946, Miroslav Didek, a party leader in Rome, went to Paris to make arrangements with Maček on the action to take. In particular, Didek addressed the need to act with greater force against communists and UDBA agents active in Trieste, who easily found a safe haven in nearby Yugoslavian territory after committing their operations. Maček urged Didek to come to an understanding with the British authorities. These, he believed, would not deny their support to Croatian anticommunists in Trieste. Didek got in touch with the Allied authorities once back in Rome. In November 1946, he headed for Trieste alongside British officials to instruct groups of Croats in the fight against the Yugoslav government.³⁷ Meanwhile, a mobile radio station was set up in a car to broadcast programs in Serbo-Croatian twice a week from Eboli, at preestablished times. To avoid being located, Maček's men broadcast from different sites each time. Peasant Party militants residing in Trieste circulated handbills encouraging the Croatian population to tune in. On 24 December 1946, Didek spoke on the radio to incite his fellow countrymen to fight, and even pretended to hand the microphone over to Maček, when in fact what he broadcast was a speech prerecorded in Paris. The leaders of the Peasant Party believed in this kind of propaganda so much that Maček asked his representative in Italy to intensify broadcasts and set up another radio station.³⁸

Two ultranationalist Serbian papers existed as well: *Srpske Novine* (Serbian newspaper) and *Informacije* (Information). They were printed in the refugee camp in Bagnoli and in Rome, respectively. Both praised General Mihailović, instigated the Serbian community against Croa-

37 Ibid., b. 163, Attività degli ustascia. Informativa fiduciaria, 11 November 1946.

38 Ibid., b. 345, Propaganda anticomunista in Croazia a mezzo stazione radio. Informativa fiduciaria, 26 December 1946.

tian communists and Ustashas, and provided data and news on the situation in Yugoslavia. Dobroslav Jevđević—who lived between Eboli, Potenza, and Rome, frequently changing residence and cover identity—edited the two papers. The large Serbian community in the United States backed him up with generous funds to print and distribute the papers.³⁹ Yet Jevđević enjoyed support from others, too. According to statements by a close collaborator of his, early on he'd received financial backing from an Italian army officer and a Christian democratic member of parliament. He subsequently came in contact with an undersecretary and with the head of the police, who entrusted him with the organization of an information network on behalf of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.⁴⁰ The Serb made no mystery about his dealings with high Italian officials, including General Piéche. Jevđević's job was to keep an eye on communist foreigners in Italy, particularly Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. It is plausible that he was employed for "undercover operations" of an inside nature, as well. Indeed, according to a report issued by the counterespionage unit in Bari, the group led by Jevđević was in touch with neofascist cells in Italy, and at their disposal for anticomunist operations.⁴¹

THE DISPUTE OVER WAR CRIMINALS

After Belgrade's liberation in October 1944, Tito set up the State Commission for the Establishment of Crimes Perpetrated by the Occupiers and Their Helpers in the Country (*Državna Komisija za Utvrđivanje Zločina Okupatora i Njihovih Pomagača*), a commission to investigate crimes committed by the occupiers and their collaborators. The famed academic Dušan Nedeljković served as its president, and Professor Milan Bartoš as its secretary. Through in-depth investigations, the commission gathered—either directly or from its Croatian and Slovenian

39 Ibid., Dobroslav Jevđević. *Informativa fiduciaria*, 30 October 1948.

40 Ibid., *Informativa fiduciaria*, 29 December 1948.

41 Ibid., *Relazione Centro C.S. di Bari*, 28 November 1946.

counterparts—data and information on the crimes committed by the occupiers, the Ustasha, and the Chetniks. It then made a list of war criminals featuring Croats, Serbs, Slovenes, Italians, and Germans.⁴² The Yugoslav government saw capturing those criminals as an issue of national security. From that moment on, it turned its attention to Italy, both because the commission had classified some 450 Italians as war criminals (most of them soldiers of the 2nd Army, or civil officials), and because several thousand Ustasha, Chetniks, and Slovenian collaborators had found a safe haven in Italy. Through its Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the security services, Belgrade launched an offensive against the “enemies of the people.” The results were sparse in the diplomatic arena. In June 1945, the Yugoslav representative in Rome, Josip Smodlaka, asked the Allied authorities for a list of all Yugoslav citizens present in Italian camps. The request was motivated by the fact that many war criminals were likely to be among them. A month later, Allied headquarters asked Yugoslavia for a list of wanted people, in order to ascertain whether or not they were in fact present in the Italian camps.⁴³ As a result, the Yugoslav government passed on the list of war criminals compiled by the commission headed by Nedeljković, but received no reply. In the fall, Belgrade officially appealed to the British government. Bevin, the secretary of state for foreign affairs, answered that every effort was being made to locate Pavelić and the others his government had decided to turn in, and that orders had already been given to British authorities in Austria to hand several people over.⁴⁴ Nothing came of it, however. In August 1946, the secretary-general of the Yugoslav government, Mitar Bakić, made the following statement: “Hundreds of war criminals of Yugoslav origin live freely in It-

42 In May 1945, the Croatian state commission for war crimes tackled the matter of the Jasenovac concentration camp. It interviewed over sixty survivors and carried out inspections in the camp, calling in forensic scientists, investigators, and experts in the field of photographic surveying. In November 1946, the final report was sent to the federal commission, which published it in order to expose what had happened in Jasenovac before the whole country.

43 ACS, Amgot, 10000/109/533 sc. 12 bob. 15F, July 1945.

44 Butler and Pelly, *Documents on British Policy Overseas*, doc. 35, 130–33.

aly and in other countries, assisted by various Allied authorities, and many of them demand the right to asylum as political émigrés.”⁴⁵ At that point, the Foreign Office proposed that all the Ustasha present in Italian camps be handed over to Yugoslavia, including those whose repatriation Belgrade had not requested.⁴⁶ The US Department of State approved the British proposal, and started carrying out a census. As they awaited extradition, many Croats who had served as volunteers in the independent state’s armed forces were transferred from the camps in Afragola and Rimini to the military prison in Rome.⁴⁷ Yet the requests made by the Yugoslav government were far from being satisfied.

The Vatican had long been using its diplomatic influence to prevent the extradition of war criminals. On 20 August 1945, the Secretariat of State of the Holy See urged London to reclassify some 600 Croats held in Camp 949, in Naples, as prisoners of war. There were war criminals in this group, too, but the Vatican asked that in no case these men, or any of their fellow countrymen, be turned in to Tito’s government.⁴⁸ Upon finding out from the Confraternity of St. Jerome that many Croats, particularly those interned in the camp in Grottaglie, near Taranto, were under threat of extradition, the Secretariat of State sent another urgent plea on the pope’s behalf to London and Washington in March 1946. London answered that the Allies did not wish to repatriate refugees against their will, but only war criminals. The British minister to the Holy See, Sir Osborne d’Arcy, told Vatican authorities that they were becoming the protectors of Hitler and Mussolini’s soldiers, and that the whole world saw the Vatican in this way. In the course of a private meeting, D’Arcy reportedly told Pius XII that his concept of Christian humanity appeared to be a bit too broad.⁴⁹

45 Di Sante, *Italiani senza onore*, 26.

46 The British did not look kindly on the Ustasha, and turning them in to Belgrade would mean giving the Yugoslav government some measure of satisfaction. This would make it possible not to extradite the Chetniks, who were actively cooperating with the British in Italy.

47 ACS, Amgot, 10000/164/3310-1 sc. 113 bob. 518c-Yugoslav 1946-47.

48 ACS, Amgot, 10000/119/134 Vatican-1945.

49 Dedijer, *Novi prilozi za biografiju Josipa Broza Tita*, vol. 3, 37.

Nevertheless, the pressure on the part of the Holy See did bear fruit. The Allies continually delayed turning the men in, because the Yugoslav authorities had not accompanied their requests for extradition with sufficient identification data, or provided enough details on the crimes committed by the internees. The Allies sometimes also brought up “humanitarian” reasons for their lack of action. Sure enough, it was war criminals the Yugoslav authorities were demanding be repatriated, but, even so, the British and the Americans lamented that the Yugoslavs made a perverse use of justice and carried out a campaign of repression against opposition elements.⁵⁰ Still, the Allies felt compelled to make a gesture of some kind. On 26 April 1947, the pope made another heartfelt appeal, “this time in favor of fifteen [Ustasha] awaiting extradition at a British-controlled military prison in Rome.” The next day, the British police in charge of the prison took Moškov, Kren, and five other Ustasha and extradited them to Yugoslavia. On 30 May, Dušan Žanko and the remaining seven men escaped from prison. The British intelligence services described the escape as “the most spectacular achievement of the [Ustasha] in Italy against the British authorities.”⁵¹ The fugitives sought shelter at St. Jerome’s, where Draganović looked after them for a time before sending them disguised as friars to a remote Franciscan monastery near Cosenza.

In the course of 1947, the Yugoslav government made repeated public statements to the effect that many war criminals were being aided in their flight to Argentina by St. Jerome’s, with support from the PCA, which supplied them with visas and financial means. According to Yugoslav authorities, the PCA was acting in violation of the United Nations decision calling for criminals to be turned in to those countries where the crimes had been committed.⁵² Even though the Yugoslav government provided the Allies with a list of 936 war criminals, only 22 Ustashas and 50 Chetniks were repatriated by the end of 1947.⁵³

50 Slany, *U.S. and Allied Wartime and Postwar Relations and Negotiations*, 152–153.

51 Goni, *The Real Odessa*, 333 and 338.

52 Ibid., 332.

53 Dedijer, *Novi prilozi za biografiju Josipa Broza Tita*, vol. 3, 38.

Yugoslavia's diplomatic efforts were supplemented by the presence in Italy of the men belonging to the efficient and menacing UDBA led by Aleksandar Ranković. The Yugoslav government feared the formation of strong and close-knit emigrant groups, which could turn into a dangerous opposition front. Thus, secret agents infiltrated the refugee camps, the Pontifical Croatian College of St. Jerome, and all organizations, parties, and lesser groups of Yugoslav émigrés. This allowed Ranković to gain a rather complete picture of the activities of the Yugoslavs harbored in Italy and in other countries. Aptly disguised as refugees, the UDBA agents fomented disagreements and hostilities, spreading misinformation, in order to break up the communities and induce camp internees to return to their country of origin.⁵⁴ An emblematic case of infiltration on the part of Yugoslav agents is illustrated in a note by the Italian services dated October 1946. The Ustaša had taken a powerful radio station given to them by the Germans from Rome to Milan. A man by the name of Žarko Strkalj persuaded four Ustashas to return to Yugoslavia with the transmitter to use it against the regime. But as soon as they crossed the border, the four were captured by the UDBA and executed. Clearly, Žarko Strkalj was an UDBA agent. After this incident the entire Ustaša community in Italy mobilized to apprehend him.⁵⁵

The UDBA network in Italy was doubtless made up of top-level agents, whose identification on the part of the Italian or Allied secret services was far from easy. Vjekoslav Simurina, the official Yugoslav Red Cross representative in Milan, was placed under surveillance in February 1947. A one-time career officer in the Yugoslav Royal Army, subsequently a member of the Ustaša air force information service, Simurina had been visiting the Ustaša community and the Pontifical Croatian College of St. Jerome in Rome since 1944. No one doubted

54 AUSSME, Fondo Calderini, 1946, b. 334, Attività degli ustascia croati in Roma e Firenze. Relazione Centro C.S. di Milano, 14 November 1946.

55 AUSSME, Fondo Calderini, 1947, b. 163, Attività degli ustascia. Informativa fiduciaria, 11 November 1946.

his loyalty to the Ustasha cause there. Yet, after over a year of investigations, the Italian services found out that he'd actually been carrying out espionage for the UDBA, and thus arrested him and expelled him from Italy.⁵⁶

In March 1948, the UDBA agents learned that a large group of criminals was about to set off from Naples to reach South America on-board the steamship *Santa Cruz*. The UDBA had knowledge not only of the fugitives' real names, but also of the aliases that appeared on their travel documents. The Yugoslav legation in Rome sent the list of names to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, calling for the immediate arrest of the wanted criminals. The latter managed to leave anyway, however. At that point, all the names of the fugitives were published in *Vjesnik*, the paper of the Croatian People's Front, and circulated in Italy through a release issued by Tanjug, Yugoslavia's official news agency.⁵⁷

The Yugoslav government fared no better when it came to pursuing Italian war criminals. The United Nations War Crimes Commission had received a list with the names of 447 commanders, officers, internment camp managers, soldiers, and civilian staff members from the authorities in Belgrade.⁵⁸ The chief of staff of the Italian army reacted to such pressure from Yugoslavia by producing a memorial titled "Notes on the Italian Occupation of Yugoslavia." The document's purpose was to "oppose the broad propaganda campaign [...] smearing the whole conduct of Italian occupation forces in Yugoslavia." The argument was that during the occupation, between 1941 and 1943, the situation "had degenerated because of internal strife" within Yugoslavia, and following the emergence of a "rebellion." These two events, the chief of staff maintained, had forced Italian soldiers to react "in order to spare the

56 Ibid., 1947, b. 189, Simurina Vjekoslav, 12 March 1947.

57 Ibid., 1948, b. 359, Attività dell'Udba in Italia. I criminali di guerra jugoslavi partono dall'Italia per l'Argentina, 2 March and 8 April 1948.

58 Di Sante, *Italiani senza onore*, 27. On the matter of Italian war criminals, see also: Focardi and Klinkhammer, "La questione dei 'criminali di guerra' italiani e una Commissione di inchiesta dimenticata," 526.

Serbian and Jewish population from violence at the hands of the Usta-sha." In any case, action had remained within the "limits set by the international law of war," according to the Italian army.⁵⁹

The Italian government wanted to avoid handing any Italian nationals over to Yugoslavia. The Allies indirectly facilitated this stance with their own conduct, by refusing to turn in Yugoslav war criminals present on Italian soil. In the tug-of-war that followed, the Yugoslav government used another weapon. About 17,000 Italians were still anxiously awaiting repatriation from the Balkans. But Tito decided to withhold them until his fellow countrymen were turned in. This deadlock clearly made relations between Italy and Yugoslavia all the more strained.

The Italian government ultimately found a way out by setting up its own investigation commission to adjudicate on Italian suspects in Italy. De Gasperi inaugurated it in April 1946, "after news came out that the Allied command was arresting Italian war criminals to turn them in to Yugoslavia."⁶⁰ Presided over by Luigi Gasparotto, the commission operated from September 1946 to January 1948. At the end of the preliminary activity, twenty-six suspects—mostly members of the military—were referred to the appropriate authorities to be tried. During the commission's work, there was a moment of great tension between Italy, on the one hand, and Yugoslavia and the Allies, on the other, when De Gasperi appointed General Taddeo Orlando, number 149 on the United Nations War Crimes Commission's list, as secretary-general of the Ministry of Defense. After the storm was over, events evolved in the Italian suspects' favor. In June 1948, following Stalin and Tito's falling out, Yugoslavia lost the international partner that had backed its requests, and no one was any longer interested in the trial against the twenty-six suspects. In 1950, the defense lawyers raised a procedural objection and called for the absolution of their clients on grounds

⁵⁹ Di Sante, *Italiani senza onore*, 24.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 31. Great Britain submitted 497 Italians suspected of war crimes, most of them members of the military, to the attention of the United Nations Commission.

of mistrial. The request was accepted, and the proceedings dismissed, putting an end to the whole matter. Yugoslavia paid the price of its political weakness and international isolation. No Italian was tried for the crimes committed during the period of Italy's military occupation of Yugoslavia.

The Anticommunist Crusade

SOCIALIST YUGOSLAVIA

In the spring of 1945, after four years of foreign occupation and civil war, Yugoslavia was in a dreadful state. “Over one million of its citizens had died on the battlefields and in the concentration camps, or fallen victim to interethnic and ideological violence; three million people were left without a roof over their heads, and there were a staggering 236,000 war orphans.” The passage of three foreign armies had wiped out the greater part of the country’s livestock, as well as its roads and rail lines. While industrial areas in Slovenia and in Croatia suffered less extensive damage, production was halved there between 1941 and 1945 as well.¹

The war also brought on a generational revolution. Partisan units and mass social organizations alike had been made up for the most part of youths and young adults aged between sixteen and thirty. Once the war was over, this generation ascended to top positions in the state. Excepting Tito who was forty-nine, Yugoslavia’s communist leaders were all young: Edvard Kardelj was thirty-one, Aleksandar Ranković was thirty-two, Milovan Đilas was thirty, and Vladimir Bakarić and Boris Kidrič were both twenty-nine.²

The Yugoslav Communist Party did not run alone in the elections for the Constituent Assembly, but in a coalition composed of all the forces

¹ Pirjevec, *Il giorno di San Vito*, 204.

² Bilandžić, *Hrvatska moderna povjest*, 197.

that had contributed to the liberation struggle.³ Nevertheless, through deft use of legislative tools, coercion, and propaganda administered to their own advantage, communists managed to secure an overwhelming majority of seats on the assembly. On 29 November 1945, the latter unanimously voted to abolish the monarchy and establish the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. From that moment on, the Communist Party was the only party present on the political scene.⁴ Now that the old administrative apparatus had been overthrown, posts were assigned to new cadres chosen within the Communist Party, while the new Yugoslav constitution was modeled on the Soviet constitution of 1936. The state assumed ownership of the means of production and took control of all trade with foreign countries. The nationalization of economic enterprises and the collectivization of lands marked the country's definitive transition to a socialist society. Yugoslavia turned into the Soviet Union's most ardent follower at a time when no other country in Eastern Europe had yet set out on a similar path.

These transformations were effected mobilizing the masses through pervasive propaganda extolling the cause of socialism and the peaceful coexistence of peoples. The revolution favored new ways for life in common, freeing youths and women in particular from centuries-long patriarchal bonds. After playing an important part in partisan units, women now entered into the administrative and political apparatus at all levels. Widespread among communists was a vision of the future imbued with elements of utopianism, which strengthened their conviction of being able to lead society toward a bright time ahead. The classic iconography of communist regimes, devoted to representing a simplified world, flourished. The slogan "Death to Fascism, Freedom to the People" was

3 The Yugoslav Communist Party was made up of about 12,000 members before the war. During the four years of the war 9,000 of them died. Yet by the end of the war it had expanded to about 141,000 members owing to the prestige acquired in the national liberation struggle. See Bilandžić, *Historija Socijalističke Federativne Republike Jugoslavije*, 101.

4 The communists managed to sway many Croatian peasants to their side by adopting the language of the Peasant Party and by providing assurances that social reforms would be enacted and land would be expropriated from large estate owners and redistributed.

ubiquitous. In the new official acceptance of the word, “fascism” stood for anything reminiscent of the past or of opposition. Those who did not openly side with the Communist Party were branded as outdated.

While the regime issued a broad amnesty, it also eliminated political opposition through the UDBA, its tentacular instrument of repression. Upstanding citizens guilty only of belonging to democratic parties, such as the Croatian Peasant Party, which had fought against Nazi fascism in hopes of building a new democratic and pluralistic state, were dragged into the same whirlwind of trials as those responsible for heinous crimes perpetrated during the war. The secret police itself formulated charges against the defendants and collaborated with the magistrates, often party functionaries. It’s easy to see how the courts’ sentences stemmed from political necessity far more than they did from a desire to uphold the law. Through the forced expulsion of foreigners, the censorship of opposition, the elevation to positions of power within the government, economy, and university of people loyal to the new regime, everyone was made aware of the party’s supremacy in all vital sectors of public and civil life.⁵

OPPOSITION TO THE COMMUNIST REGIME

On 18 June 1945, Tito declared the end of the state of war, but hotbeds of revolt and armed groups were still present in some areas of the country. Though they posed no serious threat, they attested to the existence of opposition to the regime. Chetniks were present in the southeastern provinces of the republic, while groups of nationalists—the Greens—assaulted garrisons and convoys to acquire food and ammunition on roadsides in Montenegro.⁶ Far from forming a cohesive front,

⁵ Simoniti, “Permanent Revolution, Totalitarianism and Fear,” 20.

⁶ In January 1947, according to an Italian consular source in Yugoslavia, there were about 20,000 Chetniks, and about 30,000 Crusaders; further, Krsto Popović could count on roughly 2,000 men in Montenegro (MAE, AP 1946–1950, Yugoslavia, 121019/3–6, 18 February 1947).

these groups were divided into small cells. One at a time, they all fell into the net laid out for them by the police, whose systematic roundups were aimed precisely at liquidating them.

The Chetnik commander Draža Mihailović was captured in March 1946. He was brought before the court alongside fascists and collaborators, and thus crimes far worse than those ascribable to him alone were addressed in the course of the hearing. Authorities were sympathetic to Mihailović in the United States, and even offered to supply him with the best lawyers.⁷ The Chetnik commander committed two mistakes, however. First, he turned down—albeit politely—the international support he was offered. Second, when he was made to understand that if he confessed to collaborating with the Nazis, he would have his life spared, he yielded, whereby signing his own death sentence.

Armed groups were active in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, too. These comprised soldiers who had fought in the Ustasha militia, the army, or the Wehrmacht's Croatian legions, and had not surrendered but instead gone into hiding in the country's remote and hard-to-reach interior after May 1945. They assumed the name of *Križari* (Crusaders), which had belonged to the Catholic Action youth group before the war. "While they were not properly religious groups, faith was essential to them, as attested to by their slogan 'Glory to Christ, Death to the Communists,' which underlined their opposition to an atheist regime." The *Križari* "adopted the point of view of the Ustasha, who believed the partisan movement to be dominated by Serbs and communists, and therefore hostile to Croatia."⁸ The Crusaders hoped that a third world war would break out soon, and that they would be able to fight alongside the British and Americans to free Europe from communism, tear down the Yugoslav regime, and rebuild the Independent State of Croatia.

7 The US government requested that its liaison officers with the partisan troops be allowed to testify during the trial. The US government intended to prove that Mihailović, too—not just Tito—had contributed to the fight against the Germans. Belgrade rejected the request.

8 Radelić, *Križari*, 7 and 22.

In 1945, Father Ivo Grgurev was sentenced to fifteen years in prison for some articles praising the Independent State of Croatia he had published in the Šibenik paper *Hrvatski Jadran*. During the questioning he had said that “in those days everybody believed that the English and the Americans would arrive soon. [...] No one could imagine then that the Western superpowers, which ruled the seas and oceans, could allow the Soviet bear to put its paws into the Adriatic Sea.”⁹

The Crusaders could not properly be called a terrorist organization, both because they were not politically organized and because their (disjointed) cells lacked a hierarchy and command structure. Divided into about 200 groups, made up on average of between five and ten members, the Crusaders mostly struck in rural areas of the country. They sabotaged communication lines, ambushed Yugoslav army convoys, made attempts on the life of public administration officials, and attacked collective farms, a symbol of the communist system. The first acts dated back to the summer of 1945, and continued in the months that followed: Josip Poduje, a union leader, was killed in Preboj, Lika; a group under the command of Milan Frković, the brother of former minister Ivica, killed Ivan Došen and Jure Čalić, two communist activists, near Brušan; eight town councilmen fell in an ambush in Benkovac: two of them died, while the others sustained serious injuries.¹⁰

Small opposition groups were present in urban centers as well. In the fall of 1945, a handful of Zagreb high school students founded the Secret Croatian Youth Organization and started to undermine the Communist Party conferences held in the schools. They wrote slogans on the city walls, circulated fliers, and tore Tito's portraits down from classroom walls. In a few years' time, however, all the organization's members were arrested and sentenced to between one and five years in prison. An organization called the Dalmatian Crusaders' Movement was active in Zadar (Zara). In November 1946, four members of

9 Jonjić, “Organised Resistance,” 114.

10 Scotti, *Ustascia tra il fascio e la svastica*, 189.

the group were sentenced to long prison terms for their plan to assassinate “representatives of the people’s authority, and for subsequently attempting to flee by sea to join refugee groups abroad.” Between 1945 and 1946, an illegal organization called the People’s Resistance Society was set up in Osijek, Slavonia, with the aim to fight against the regime with violent means. The group’s founder Mirko Hubak and its main members were soon arrested and tried. Hubak was sentenced to death, and the others to long prison terms. In 1947, a group that called itself the Croatian Liberation Movement (HOP) was active in Split (Spalato). The group’s most spectacular act of opposition took place on 10 April 1947, the anniversary of the founding of the Independent State of Croatia, when it raised a huge Croatian flag atop Mount Marjan. Dozens of group members were arrested and sentenced in a matter of days.¹¹

The repression carried out by the UDBA was relentless. In November 1947, the police barged into a crowded clandestine meeting in a town in western Herzegovina, and killed all those in attendance. The next month, the state of emergency was declared in the whole area, and a court-martial was set up in Posušje. Many local residents were confined in a makeshift camp, while others were expelled and relocated to far-away regions, and others still were sentenced to imprisonment.¹²

According to official estimates made in public occasions by the interior minister Ranković, guerrilla groups totaled about 5,700 active men at the end of 1945. This number dropped to 3,000 by 1946, and to 1,700 by 1947. As for the Crusaders, the UDBA archives indicate about 2,500 active men at the end of 1945, 550 men in 1946, and a little over 500 men in 1947. Other sources report higher numbers: 3,000 men in 1945, and about 1,500 men in 1947.¹³

Tito first spoke of the Crusaders in the second half of 1945. In an interview to the French newspaper *L’Humanité*, he claimed Catholic priests were leading them. The charge was an exaggeration, but

¹¹ Jonjić, “Organised Resistance,” 123–28.

¹² Ibid., 119.

¹³ Radelić, *Križari*, 481.

the groups did avail themselves of stable and systematic relationships with members of the clergy, who aided them and even participated in their activities, though rarely. In Franciscan, Dominican, and Capuchin monasteries, as well as in female convents, the Crusaders were given lodging, food, clothing, and medical supplies. The Crusaders' flag—sewn in a nunnery in Zagreb and consecrated in a chapel belonging to the archbishopric—was modeled on the Croatian flag, complemented with the motto "Faith in God and Understanding among Peasants" and the golden words "For Croatia and for Christ, against Communism." Many Crusaders saw Archbishop Stepinac as their spiritual and moral leader, even though his open support to the guerrilla fighters is not documented.

At the end of May 1945, Anzelmo Canjuga, a Capuchin friar from the monastery in Osijek, was tried for aiding the group led by Mate Dasović. In March 1948, in Subotica, Vojislav Pešut and ten other persons, including three priests, were convicted. In the same period, in western Herzegovina, "two rifles, three bombs and 26 bullets [were] planted at the home of Father Ratimir Kordić, a parish priest in Drinovci, who was suspected of assisting Herzegovinian Crusaders. As a result, he was sentenced to six years of incarceration."¹⁴ There were many other similar cases, and the depositions and confessions provided in the course of the trials painted a picture of broad collusion throughout continental Croatia, even extending to Dalmatia and to the islands. Even so, the regime's offensive exceeded the bounds of the struggle against the Crusaders and their supporters. The regime's broader strategy was to repress all anticommunist opposition, of which the Roman Church was believed to be a relevant part. Indeed, the Catholic Church in Croatia stood out for the depth of its pastoral efforts, sustained by Catholic associations and by many organs of the press. Thus, the regime seized the opportunity that the collusion between some religious and the Crusaders offered to discredit the Croatian Church,

¹⁴ Jonjić, "Organised Resistance," 139.

which it further accused of subservience to the interests of the Vatican, in spite of the latter's support to Italy in the contention with Yugoslavia over Trieste.

THE STEPINAC TRIAL

In June 1945, Tito publicly declared his hope for a more national Catholic Church, with greater ties to its people.¹⁵ The message was clearly aimed at Archbishop Stepinac. The national and autocephalous Orthodox Christian Church was what Tito had in mind as a possible model. He would have liked to see a state-sponsored Yugoslav Catholic Church, independent of Rome. The new revolutionary elite viewed the bonds existing between Yugoslav bishops and the Vatican as tantamount to interference by a foreign power. When Stepinac met Tito and Vladimir Bakarić, the head of the Croatian Communist Party, his suspicions were confirmed: while the new regime recognized him as the spiritual leader of the Croatian Catholic Church, it also expected him to make some kind of gesture to prove the latter's autonomy from Rome and its discontinuity with the past. Despite the tension between them and their mutual distrust, Tito and Stepinac appeared in public together, suggesting that political authority and religious authority could coexist peacefully. Perhaps Tito believed finding a *modus vivendi* with the Catholic episcopate was still possible. As for Stepinac, when asked how he could approve the communist regime, he would answer as follows: "What matters to me is ecclesiastical and divine law; I accept legal power. While the Croatian state was in existence, legal power belonged to Ante Pavelić. But now, that state no longer exists. Now, Yugoslavia and Tito hold legal power, and I accept it."¹⁶

At the end of July 1945, Stepinac wrote to Bakarić lamenting that, despite the commitments Tito had made during the meeting in June,

¹⁵ Alexander, *Church and State in Yugoslavia since 1945*, 58.

¹⁶ HDA, RSUP-SRH-SDS, 001.15, Izjava o kleru, 5.

priests and religious were still being arrested. Shortly afterward, the archbishop raised the issue of the Catholic Church's dire material conditions, engendered by the regime-sponsored nationalizations. In the face of these protests, Tito replied that the arrests targeted individuals responsible for specific crimes, not the Church as an institution, and that exonerating the Church from the obligations set forth by the agrarian reform would be impossible.¹⁷

Stepinac and his fellow Yugoslav bishops hardened their stance in the course of an episcopal conference in September 1945. A letter sent to all Catholic worshippers cast aspersions on the government. It decried the "breaking of commitments," and the "slaughtering of priests." It denounced the existence of "Yugoslav Buchenwalds" in which members of the clergy were being detained. It lamented the abolition of religion in middle schools, religious organizations' administration by outside commissioners, and the ban placed on the Catholic press. Finally, it stated that the regime was at work to exclude the Catholic Church from Yugoslav public life altogether.¹⁸

It was a direct attack, delivered with lucid firmness. A month later, a deeply irritated Tito answered by publishing a letter in all Yugoslav papers. He questioned the bishops' motives for not writing a pastoral letter like this one when the Serbs were being brutally slaughtered by the Ustashas. Why were they spreading racial hatred now, when everyone ought to be working to heal the wounds inflicted by the war? Why had so many Ustasha leaders been educated in the seminaries of Bosnia-Herzegovina? Hadn't enough blood been spilled in the last five years?¹⁹

Stepinac's pastoral letter, and a second letter he wrote reiterating the charges, marked the definitive split between the Yugoslav state and the Croatian Catholic Church. It's reasonable to assume that the archbish-

¹⁷ According to the 1945 agrarian reform law, private subjects, whether individuals or institutions, could not own more than 20–25 hectares of land (35 hectares in mountain regions). The Catholic Church lost ownership of a great deal of properties as a result. See Bilandžić, *Hrvatska moderna povjest*, 223.

¹⁸ "Jugoslavia," 261–68.

¹⁹ Alexander, *Church and State in Yugoslavia since 1945*, 73.

op's initiative had been agreed upon with the Holy See. Pius XII was deeply persuaded that communism threatened Christian civilization as no other force had ever threatened it "in its two-thousand-year history." This outlook—and the ensuing visions of "chaos and slavery" in the event of the collapse of the Western political, economic, and social system—led the pope to use the Church's authority, prestige, and organization to oppose the expansion of communist regimes. He believed seeking an understanding with the latter was unacceptable on principle, and without prospects in practice.²⁰ Thus, Pius XII exposed Yugoslav bishops, and indeed bishops throughout Eastern Europe, to great personal sacrifice. He was convinced that a martyred and persecuted Catholic Church might be of use on the field of international politics in strengthening the anticommunist front.

On 15 December 1945, Vladimir Bakarić announced the beginning of a new, more forceful campaign against the Catholic Church, while the central committees of the Yugoslav and Croatian communist parties endorsed the archbishop's arrest.²¹ Tito offered the nuncio in Belgrade, Joseph Hurley, a way out. If the Holy See summoned Stepinac to Rome, no one would stop him from leaving. If he stayed, however, he would be arrested, the marshal warned. The Vatican replied that it was not "in the habit of removing innocent bishops for the sole purpose of pleasing their persecutors," and left Stepinac in place "to fight his battle."²²

During two searches in the archbishop's palace in Zagreb, the Yugoslav secret services found medical supplies probably intended for the Crusaders and a letter the Ustasha general Ante Moškov had sent the archbishop months before from Italy. Finally, they found out that Erih Lisak, a Ministry of the Interior official under Pavelić who had fled the country after May 1945, had returned to Yugoslavia clandestinely and gone to the archbishop's palace. Based on this evidence, the regime charged Stepinac with "conspiracy against the Yugoslav government."

²⁰ Di Nolfo, *Vaticano e Stati Uniti*, 524 and 583.

²¹ Jonjić, "Organised Resistance," 137.

²² Cavalli, "Al processo dell'Arcivescovo di Zagabria," 318.

The archbishop's lawyers defended him to the best of their abilities. They claimed he had not been aware of Lisak's identity, for the latter had provided false personal information. They said the piece of mail he'd received from Moškov did not prove the two had exchanged letters systematically. And, lastly, they maintained his colleagues had helped the Crusaders without his knowing. But the archbishop's fate had already been sealed out of court as a matter of politics. He was sentenced to sixteen years in prison, and to the loss of his civil rights for an additional five years.

Following the Stepinac trial, the regime's offensive against the clergy intensified.²³ Priests, monks, and nuns were brought before the courts of law. The bishop of Mostar, Petar Čule, was sentenced to eleven years in prison. Meanwhile, the bishop of the island of Krk, Josip Srebrnić, was placed under arrest for two months. In Slovenia, the bishop of Ljubljana, Rožman—who had compromised his position by collaborating with the occupation forces and fled the country without the Vatican's permission, leaving the post vacant—was tried in absentia. On 26 May 1947, the district court of Zadar (Zara) found Father Eugen Konatić and five other people guilty of activities against the state. That same year, Franciscans from Pula (Pola), Rovigno, and Poreč (Parenzo) were tried on charges of serving as spies for foreign powers. Stanislav Blatnik, the superior of the Salesian Order, was found guilty of the same crimes in absentia. One of the most talked-about trials was the one against six religious from the Franciscan monastery of the Madonna of Lourdes, in Zagreb, accused of conspiracy against the state. According to the UDBA, Father Jozo Mikulić had reentered the country carrying the explosives necessary to blow up a factory located in the monastery's vicinity. Some monks confessed during the hearing. In the summer of 1947, the district court of Zagreb sentenced four of them to the death penalty, and the remaining two monks and three members of the laity to long prison terms.²⁴

23 The Yugoslav government was under pressure by communist Serbs, who wished to punish the Catholic Church for its compromising relationship with the Ustasha during the war.

24 Jonjić, "Organised Resistance," 139 and 141. The author, a Croatian historian, claims the UDBA forced the religious to confess.

That same year, in Ljubljana, a group of Franciscans was also brought to court for allegedly harboring fleeing Ustashas, and helping them reach Austria and Italy. Some nuns in Lichtenturn faced the same charges and were tried before a people's court. Lazarist friars stood trial in Celje. The following year, Magdalene nuns and Jesuits were tried in Slovenska Bistrica.²⁵ In March 1948, the district court of Subotica condemned eleven people, among whom three priests, guilty of forming a gang of Crusaders. A few days later, the same court condemned nine other anticommunists, including three religious.²⁶

Members of the clergy were sentenced to long prison terms in most cases. The death penalty was only applied in the face of clear responsibilities for anticommunist activities after May 1945. The nuncio in Belgrade repeatedly called for the defendants to be pardoned. This request was turned down in the case of the Franciscan friar Kerubin Posavec, sentenced to death by the court in Slavonska Požega in April 1946, and of Father Poljak, sentenced to death by the court in Split. It was accepted in the case of four nuns sentenced to death by the court in Gospić; three of the sisters had their death sentence commuted to twenty years of forced labor.²⁷

In the conflict between the Yugoslav state and the Croatian Catholic Church, the Holy See played an important part, and could count on a powerful ally. Amleto Cicognani, the apostolic delegate in Washington, had openly told officials at the Department of State that the Holy See viewed the United States as its “greatest ally and greatest hope against communism.” Intense collaboration ensued between Rome and Washington. American bishops Patrick Hurley and Gerald O'Hara were appointed to the nunciature of two countries on the other side of the Iron Curtain, Yugoslavia and Romania, while another American prelate, Aloisius J. Muench, was entrusted with important diplomatic missions in the Vatican Secretariat of State. Fearing Yugoslav author-

25 Griesser-Pečar, “Trials Against Clergy and Religious Orders After May 1945,” 41–43.

26 Jonjić, “Organised Resistance,” 139.

27 MSPS, Fond PA, 1946, f. 45, d. 17, sign. b. 8938 and sign. b. 9405; f. 45, d. 12, sign. b. 5182.

ities might open diplomatic letters to and from the Vatican, the nunciature in Belgrade often communicated with the Holy See through the US embassy. All the while, Hurley also provided the US ambassador Patterson with information and reports intended for the Department of State.²⁸

THE HRVATSKI NARODNI OTPOR

In the summer of 1945, the refugees who poured into Austria from Yugoslavia bore news of guerrilla warfare being carried out by the Crusaders in interior regions of the country. The information was fragmentary. Nevertheless, it lifted the spirits of the Ustashas. Ante Moškov decided to go see for himself what was happening. At the end of the summer, together with four other Ustashas, he reached Hungary on a truck. The five crossed the Yugoslav border on foot near Čakovec, and headed to Varaždin, where they met with locals and acquaintances of theirs from Zagreb. Moškov was bitterly disappointed to see there was no sign of armed resistance or guerrilla warfare, and that the rumors he had heard were baseless.²⁹

Božidar Kavran, a young pharmacist who had held military and civil positions during the war, and subsequently organized the escape routes into Austria, was meanwhile gaining prominence among the Ustashas in hiding there. Kavran had arrived in the British occupation zone in May 1945, and assumed a key role in the salvaging of the gold looted in Zagreb, and as a liaison agent between the hierarchs.³⁰ Soon, Artuković, Balen, Frković, Kulenović, and Sušić coalesced around Kavran. They decided to mobilize the Ustasha scattered in the refugee camps in Spittal an der Drau, Salzburg, Trofaiach, and Radstadt, as well as those who were hiding in monasteries. A new organization, the Hrvatski Narodni Otpor (Croatian National Resistance), was set up

28 Gallagher, "The United States and the Vatican in Yugoslavia 1945–1950," 119–20.

29 Krizman, *Pavelić u bjekstvu*, 127.

30 *Tko je tko u NDH*, 185.

between the end of 1945 and the early months of 1946 with the aim of resuming anti-Yugoslavian conspiratorial activities. With Pavelić's blessings, main leadership positions were taken over by Božidar Kavran (in charge of activities in Yugoslavia), Lovro Sušić (ideology), Mate Frkovic (foreign affairs), and Meho Mehičić (economy and finance).

The structure of the Ustasha movement further developed with the birth of the Hrvatsko Državno Vodstvo (Croatian State Leadership) and of the Hrvatski Državni Odbor (Croatian State Committee). The former was to assume a leadership function within the movement, whereas the latter would be a Croatian government in exile of sorts. According to Ljubo Miloš, "the initiative for the creation of the Hrvatski Državni Odbor (Croatian State Committee) had been taken under the direction of Lovro Sušić and Božidar Kavran. The committee's task was to organize groups of fighters, so that they might carry out an insurrection in the former Independent State of Croatia."³¹

One of Pavelić's main concerns was that the Hrvatsko Državno Vodstvo should not appear to be a result of his desire to appease the British and Americans; he wanted it to appear to be a democratic and pluralistic political organism capable of giving voice to Croatian national expectations. The *poglavnik* even claimed he wanted to co-opt Vladko Maček to work with this command structure. All the while, though, he was determined to keep the leadership of the Croatian movement that had found refuge abroad firmly in his own hands.³²

When Pavelić left Austria to go to Italy in mid-1946, Lovro Sušić acted as his proxy. Drago Jilek was appointed to be in charge of the newly reestablished movement's operations in Italy; Janko Tortić and Ivica Gržeta resumed activities in Germany; Branko Jelić was entrusted with leading operations in London. Meanwhile, contacts were reestablished with Vanče Mihailov's men and with Romanian nationalists. As a result, Ustashism once again became a secret and conspiratorial

³¹ Krizman, *Pavelić u bjekstvu*, 167.

³² Radelić, *Križari*, 46–47.

organization, as it had been between 1929 and 1941. To impart orders or information to the hierarchs, Pavelić resumed using a cipher, the key to which was known only by his closest collaborators.

In the course of 1947, Kavran wrote and circulated a document titled “Basic Backing for the Croatian National Struggle” (“Načelna podloga hrvatske narodne borbe”), serving as a guideline for the organization of the anticommunist struggle in Croatia and in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The motto “Ready for the Fatherland,” which had accompanied the Ustasha movement since its inception, was replaced by the new motto “Croatia Will Win, Everything for Croatia.” Kavran believed the Croatian State Committee should base itself in Croatia, in order to allow its members to take the reins of the anticommunist struggle into their hands. According to his vision, shared by Frković and Rosandić, the other body—the Croatian State Leadership—should remain abroad, in Austria or in Italy, to direct the committee’s activities.³³

The Ustasha movement’s revival coincided with the crisis we have already mentioned between Yugoslavia and the United States. As relations between Belgrade and Washington deteriorated, the will to teach Tito a harsh lesson took root in US military circles. “One day in the fall of 1947,” Frković recounted, “we came in contact with American officials in Zall am See, near Pinzgau. We met [with them] on a number of occasions, in several Austrian cities: Graz, Villach, Klagenfurt, Salzburg. For the most part, we would meet in a café in Salzburg. We were well received. It was our job to report on what was happening back in our country, which we were informed of by our men.” The US officials were interested in knowing whether Croatia would be able to rise up against Tito’s regime and resist for at least eight days. Frković did not provide a precise answer to this question, but he did give the Americans a map detailing where the groups of Crusaders were located in the woods of Croatia.³⁴

³³ Krizman, *Pavelić u bjekstvu*, 170–71.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 174 and 177.

The US secret service's collaboration with the Ustasha soon took the form of logistical–military support, with the creation of a training base in Austria. Other groups of Ustasha émigrés were “trained under the direct control of the American services in Germany, where they received help in the form of weapons, uniforms, equipment, and provisions to be sent to the groups active in Yugoslavia with the use of airplanes.” Kavran sent Ante Vrban to Yugoslavia through the Hungarian border. He remained there for over a month, combing the area near Mount Papuk in Slavonia and coming into contact with several Crusaders. The mission had two objectives: identifying an area suited to receive material launched from airplanes flying overhead, and transferring a group active in Herzegovina atop Mount Čvrsnica to receive war supplies from Italy.³⁵

The US support to the Ustashas was part of a broader project. This entailed much more than just sending men to Yugoslavia to destabilize the new regime. If the Cold War degenerated into an open clash with the Soviet Union, the Ustasha could serve as a small but ideologically motivated army, able to open a road for itself from Croatia to Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria, thereby increasing efforts against communism throughout Eastern Europe. While the Crusaders' armed actions were limited in number and scope, the implications of the support that was coming from the United States propelled the entire Ustasha community into activism, in view of more complex military operations. The trip Pečnikar—Pavelić's close collaborator in Italy—made to Chieti serves as a meaningful confirmation of this. According to an Italian secret services report, Vilko Pečnikar estimated—perhaps overestimated—there were about 5,000 Ustashas in Italy and 25,000 in Yugoslavia, all of them prepared to rise up against the communists.³⁶

³⁵ Radelić, *Križari*, 53.

³⁶ AUSSME, Fondo Calderini, 1947, b. 158, Pečnikar Vilko, 17 April 1947.

PLAN 10 APRIL

The penetration of Yugoslavia by a limited number of Ustasha officials had given rise to occasional missions between 1945 and 1946. Now, as the events developed and support came from the United States, the Ustasha command elaborated a far more complex plan in Austria, coordinating with Pavelić and with the Ustasha located in Italy. The task at hand was to get war supplies, and fighters able to link the dispersed cells of Crusaders together under a single command, into Yugoslavia. The operation's code name was "Plan 10 April," from the founding date of the Independent State of Croatia. The operation's goal was to organize a general strike in Croatia, "bringing the economy to a standstill and causing a popular anticommunist uprising."³⁷ An operational center was set in motion in Austria, near the Slovenian border. Kavran assumed the role of military coordinator—although, to hear Mate Frković tell it, "he had little experience with that sort of work."³⁸

The first group entered Yugoslavia on 15 February 1947, and stayed there until 7 April. It was equipped with weapons, clothing, compasses, Hungarian florins, and Yugoslav dinars. The Ustasha had absolutely no idea they were under the surveillance of the UDBA. The latter had infiltrated the Ustasha refugee camps with its own agents, and even gained access to the men in charge of emigration and Kavran's group. Ante Vrbanić, Ljubomir Milošević, and Luka Grgić entered Yugoslavia from Hungary between 6 and 7 June, crossing the border along the River Drava. Vrbanić was to reach Mount Papuk, in Slavonia, make contact with the groups active in the area, and set up a headquarters of sorts, from which to coordinate all Crusader cells. Milošević was to establish a training center in Bilogora, near Bjelovar. Subsequently, Vrbanić would move to Bosnia to get in touch with other Crusaders, and Milošević would reach Podravina for the same purpose, returning to Hungary after that, and sending a report to

³⁷ Radelić, *Križari*, 54.

³⁸ Krizman, *Pavelić u bjelostoku*, 165 and 173.

the operational center. The mission's goals were manifold. The men were to verify whether Luburić and Boban were still alive, and establish where they were carrying out their activities. They would also determine whether the Crusaders who had taken to the woods needed medical or spiritual support, or any other kind of assistance. And they would set up an address in Hungary newspapers and propaganda material could be sent to from Austria, before being smuggled into Yugoslavia. During their first radio contact with Kavran on 9 June, Vrban, Miloš and Grgić said they still hadn't been able to get in touch with the Crusaders in Podravina, and that they would retry on Mount Papuk. For over a month, the three wandered in the Bilogora region, on Mount Papuk and on Mount Psunj, north of Nova Gradiška, without locating a single group. Upon returning to Mount Papuk on 19 July, they believed they would find a band of Crusaders. Instead, UDBA agents ambushed them, killing Grgić and arresting Miloš and Vrban. The agents seized directives by Lovro Sušić regarding the committee's organization in Croatia, orders for those who lived in hiding, suggestions on how to approach groups of Crusaders, a few issues of *Danica* (a paper published by Croatian émigrés), military maps, two guns, and—most importantly—secret codes for use during radio contacts with Kavran and the operation center in Austria. News of Miloš and Vrban's arrest was kept secret, and Miloš was forced to collaborate to attract other Ustashas into Yugoslavia. The center in Austria continued to dispatch new groups. One by one, these fell into the trap laid out for them. With each arrest, the UDBA gained a more comprehensive understanding of the full scope of "Plan 10 April." The latter entailed creating a ramified conspiratorial structure in Croatia, divided into districts. In each, men of the cloth and parish priests were supposed to gather information and coordinate activities under the orders of a commander. The religious were expected to relay the information they gathered to the structure's center and operative units. The smallest operative units would be the "roj," a secret cell made up of three people.³⁹

39 Ibid., 179–80, and 184.

Early in 1948, after at least twelve groups had left for Yugoslavia, Pavelić's second-in-command, Lovro Sušić, sent Božidar Kavran to Rome to settle a number of political and organizational matters with the *poglavnik*. Pavelić's assent was needed for the appointment of Ustasha leaders in certain countries with Croatian émigrés. But what was mainly in need of discussion with Pavelić was the issue of the contacts with the Americans: Mate Frković was in touch with members of the US Department of State, while Vladimir Sabolić and Vilko Rieger had dealings with the US secret service through former German officials such as Rotter, Mosser, and Werner. What did the *poglavnik* make of this? How could the Ustasha movement exploit this network of contacts to the utmost, and to its own advantage?

Once in Rome, Kavran learned it would not be possible for him to meet the *poglavnik* for security reasons. Thus, he had a courier deliver a written report, and waited for a reply from the *poglavnik*. He then met with the leading members of the Ustasha community, starting with Father Bujanović, who, by way of the friars that published the *Danica* in Chicago, received funds for the refugees in Italy. Then came the turn of Zvonimir Fržop, formerly a reporter and Ustasha colonel in Šibenik (Sebenico), who now worked as a bursar in a monastery in Grottaferrata. The exchange of opinions Kavran had with Draganović proved most valuable. Kavran wanted to know how Krunoslav viewed the struggle against Tito's regime, and what kind of help he might be willing to offer the Crusaders. Draganović reassured him. The struggle was close to his heart, and he would make a contribution, though he believed success to be unlikely without the direct involvement of the US army. The reverend was persuaded that a clash between the East and the West was imminent, and he further believed that the expected victory by the United States would open new perspectives for Croatia, such as independence or the establishment of a Danubian confederation. Impressed by Krunoslav's authoritativeness, Kavran proposed that he move to Austria so that he might give his valuable support to the movement. But Draganović was of the opinion that the manage-

ment of the Croatian National Resistance (Hrvatski Narodni Otpor) should be moved to Italy, where most Ustasha higher-ups, as well as many refugee leaders from a number of European countries, were living. Finally, Pavelić answered in May. He essentially approved all the decisions Kavran had made, and reiterated that he placed his full trust in Sušić, whom for all intents and purposes he considered his lieutenant. Once back in Austria, Kavran relayed the content of his meeting in Rome to Sušić and Frković, and delivered Pavelić's answers to them. He failed to mention he had not been able to meet with Pavelić in person, however. To the contrary, he said he had, and that the *poglavnik* had encouraged him.⁴⁰

Srećko Rover had replaced Kavran during his absence, sending three groups of men to Yugoslavia. Kavran later dispatched yet another group, which included Vjekoslav Blaškov and Vladimir Sabolić, two of Kavran's close collaborators who had also held important political and administrative posts in the Independent State of Croatia. On 4 July 1948, Kavran himself crossed the border at the head of a group of men and fell into the UDBA's net. The anti-Križari action, which the Yugoslav security services had dubbed "Operation Guardian," thus came to an end: eighteen groups, totaling ninety-six men, had been captured one by one, leading up to the biggest "catch" of the operation, that is, Kavran. In the course of the final radio communication with the Ustasha center in Austria, the UDBA agents put their cards on the table: "We've fucked you. All of your men are in our prisons."⁴¹

Is it possible that the Ustasha hierarchs were never troubled by doubts about "Plan 10 April"? The British secret services had informed Pavelić and Kavran that no guerrilla activity was taking place in the region's mountains. Did they deem this information unreliable, or did they simply refuse to believe it?⁴²

⁴⁰ Ibid., 188–93.

⁴¹ Radelić, *Križari*, 119.

⁴² Nikolić, *Pred vratima domovine*, 165.

THE BREAK BETWEEN STALIN AND TITO

In July 1948, Miloš, Vrban, Rosandić, and the other Ustashas who had survived the capture were tried in Zagreb. They had to answer charges of terrorist activities conducted after the war, as well as of carrying out crimes during the war. Among the latter were the mass killings that had taken place in the concentration camps. In the course of the hearing, the prosecution drew attention to the support the Ustaša had received from Western secret services and from the Vatican, as well as to the part Draganović had played in Rome and in refugee camps. Neither the names of the foreign intelligence services involved nor any other specific information was provided. Nonetheless, the regime gave great prominence to the trial on the press and radio, which amplified the responsibilities of imperialistic, Vatican, and reactionary circles for purposes of propaganda. This emphasis, though, stemmed not from the perceived danger of the Ustaša and Crusaders, but from what was happening in Yugoslavia at the time.

The relationship between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union had been strained for over a year, and further deteriorated in the first few months of 1948. Finally, diplomatic relations between the two were cut off, and Tito's brand of communism was excommunicated through the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the Cominform, made public on 28 June. Pushed out of the Soviet bloc, Yugoslavia entered a very precarious era, caused both by the danger of military invasion on the part of the Soviet Union and by Stalin's efforts to overthrow the regime from within, availing himself of the pro-Soviet current present in the Yugoslav Communist Party. Tito managed to stave off both threats, taking advantage of the trial against the Crusaders and Ustaša that was taking place in Zagreb to divert the public opinion from what was happening.

Seen from Washington, the unexpected break between Belgrade and Moscow was a formidable weapon of anti-Soviet propaganda. As a result, the United States changed its attitude toward Yugoslavia. The United States was cautious at first: helping Tito openly would per-

haps have been counterproductive, for it might have reinforced Stalinist forces present within the Yugoslav regime by giving them a chance to accuse Tito of betraying socialism in favor of imperialism. Thus, the line of action proposed by the British secretary of state for foreign affairs Bevin—aptly summarized by the exhortation to “keep him afloat”—was adopted.⁴³ George V. Allen, the US ambassador in Belgrade, was the mind behind this new entente, which led Yugoslavia out of its international isolation and brought it closer to the Western powers. Allen reassured Tito, telling him the United States would not interfere in Yugoslavia’s domestic matters and that it would give the country financial support, without asking for it to relinquish the socialist revolution in return.⁴⁴

In this new landscape, where Yugoslavia served as a wedge in the monolithic Soviet bloc, the United States stopped collaborating with the Vatican and with the Ustasha to subvert the federal republic established by Tito. Weakened by its many losses and deprived of American support, the Crusaders’ movement fell into an irreparable crisis. The UDBA tried to isolate the last remaining rebels by striking at their families, and relocating them to other parts of the country. The most effective weapon turned out to be the infiltration of spies. In many cases, these were captured Crusaders, who were promised freedom in exchange for collaboration in the capture of others like them. The phenomenon exhausted its potential between 1949 and 1950, also owing to the regime’s ability to stigmatize the Crusaders and the Chetniks, depicting them as symbols of national hatred and as forces hindering the rise of a freer, richer new society. Subsequently, punishments inflict-

43 The signs that were coming from Washington were encouraging, however. Hungary, Romania, and Albania were no longer buying Yugoslav oil, and the United States authorized the purchase by the Allied authorities in Trieste. Delegations from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank subsequently went to Belgrade to open negotiations; Yugoslavia was thus included among those countries that could export wood to the West.

44 Together with the French ambassador Philippe Baudet, George V. Allen—who was in Belgrade from 1949 to 1953—was the Western diplomat who best understood the import of Yugoslavia’s break with the Cominform. He realized Yugoslavia would be a destabilizing force for the Soviet Bloc precisely by remaining a socialist country.

The Anticommunist Crusade

ed on the Crusaders were mitigated. In order to promote the regime's popularity and contribute to the pacification of the country, many detainees were granted an amnesty and released after spending a few years in prison.

Toward the New World

DESTINATION ARGENTINA

Between 1947 and 1949, most of the Ustashas who had sought refuge in Austria and in Italy secretly made their way to Buenos Aires. In time, the South American city became the seat of the Croatian government in exile. The decision to use Argentina for this purpose had been made during the war, as attested to by a US Office of Strategic Services (OSS) report dated 25 November 1943: according to this report, Pavelić's government had purchased sixty Argentine passports in order to facilitate the flight of the same number of people. A transferring of funds to Argentina was also documented.¹ The date is eloquent. While the war's outcome was not certain yet, the Allies had already clearly stated the fate awaiting war criminals by issuing the Moscow Declaration on 1 November 1943. Further, to Pavelić's way of thinking, Argentina was more than just a safe haven. It was an ally country, much in the same way that fascist Italy had been in the 1930s. The Ustashas would be able to reorganize their forces in Argentina, resume the struggle against communism, and ultimately take back Croatia, Pavelić believed.

A substantial and prosperous community of Croatian emigrants, wielding some influence in politics and particularly keen on Pavelić's nationalism, had existed in Argentina for decades by that time. The Domobran-Ustasha movement was well rooted there, and the Croatian community had never failed to provide the *poglavnik* with political

1 USNA, RG 226, Archives of the Office of Strategic Services, OB 6362, 25 November 1943.

and financial support. Of the nonbelligerent countries, Argentina, along with Spain, was the one with the closest ties to Hitler, and it favored all the Axis countries. Like Croatia, Germany could also count on a strong, pro-Nazi German community in Argentina. In June 1943, Germany played a decisive part in the coup that brought the colonels to power. Indeed, the latter were linked with the Reich through a covert, long-lived pact of mutual support. Thus, Argentina was the country that offered the best conditions. As a result, following the agreements between Perón and the Nazis, Pavelić had purchased that first set of precious Argentine passports and started transferring funds to Buenos Aires.

ARGENTINA AND THE THIRD REICH

As well as in the fields of politics and economy, German influence in Argentina had been particularly meaningful in the military field since the late nineteenth century. Hundreds of Argentine officers had been trained in Wilhelm II's military academies, and the German emperor had further sent military instructors and councilors to Argentina. Camaraderie between the two military castes developed as a result, greatly influencing Argentine foreign policy through the first half of the twentieth century. After remaining neutral during World War I, Argentina had pulled out of the League of Nations in 1921 to protest against the exclusion of Weimar Germany, and welcomed tens of thousands of German emigrants. The country had quickly developed between the two wars, and it had started seeking out new paths and alliances in South America, thus competing with the United States. In need of manpower, between 1933 and 1939, Argentina had even taken in 50,000 German Jews, who made up a community that was distinctly separate from the one supporting national socialism. According to a 1940 census, the German-speaking community in Argentina comprised about 130,000 members.²

² See Meding, *La ruta de los nazis en tiempo de Perón*.

After Hitler's ascent to power, an Argentine section of the National Socialist Party was set up in Buenos Aires. Supported by the German embassy, the latter spread Nazi propaganda in the German community, as well as in the area's many German-Argentine associations. Meanwhile, Fascist influence grew stronger in the Italian community, and Ustasha propaganda thrived among Croatian emigrants.

At the outbreak of World War II, Argentina chose neutrality. This made it possible for the country to continue freely exporting raw materials and foodstuffs, all the while maintaining a secret alliance with Germany. Buenos Aires became the bridgehead for Nazi penetration into countries neighboring Argentina. A pro-German South American bloc would have posed a great threat to the United States, and Washington put into effect an actual boycott against Argentina, to compel it to come to terms. When Ramón Castillo's government finally came out in favor of Argentina's taking arms alongside the Allies, the anti-US "nationalist" soldiers of the Grupo de Oficiales Unificados (United Officers' Group, GOU) answered with the coup (4 June 1943) that ultimately led to the government presided over by General Pedro Ramírez.³

All of the 3,600 GOU members favored Germany, and the Third Reich had given its full support to the preparation of the coup. In May 1943, GOU signed a secret agreement with Walter Schellenberg, at the helm of the SS foreign espionage service, on the grounds of which Argentina's military "was allowed access to the powerful radio communications network of the Nazi secret services, was provided with information culled from Nazi sources in Argentina's neighboring countries, and was promised collaboration in forming an Argentine-led South American bloc of nations." The SS benefited from the agreement, too. It "included freedom from arrest for Nazi agents in Argentina, camouflage identification for them as members of the Argentine secret ser-

3 The GOU was a "secret society, something of a [Masonic] lodge made up of 3,600 active-duty army officers" (Vita-Finzi, *Perón mito e realtà*, 20).

vice, [and] the use of the Argentine diplomatic pouch for transporting ‘secret material’ between Buenos Aires and Berlin.”⁴ As much as the coup leaders feigned neutrality right up until the spring of 1945, for all intents and purposes this agreement bound Argentina to Germany much like any other country collaborating with the Axis.

The GOU men most tied to the German secret services were Colonel Enrique Gonzales and Colonel Juan Perón, who, following the coup, entered the government as undersecretary to the war minister, Brigadier General Edelmiro Farrell. Perón and Farrell immediately set to work carrying out negotiations with Berlin to purchase weapons, and fomenting a “nationalist” revolution in Bolivia, which brought a pro-Argentine military junta to power in December 1943. It was the first step toward broadening German-Argentine influence in South America, to the detriment of Brazil and its powerful North American ally. With proof in hand of the German-Argentine backing of the Bolivian coup, Washington deployed a US fleet unit to the mouth of the Rio de la Plata. Driven into a corner, President Ramírez was forced to interrupt diplomatic relations with Germany on 26 January 1944. A month later, Ramírez was made to resign; the presidency went to General Farrell, and Perón was elevated to secretary of state. Argentina reiterated its neutrality, but the secret agreements between GOU and the SS remained in place. The diplomatic break with Berlin was but a formal act.

PERÓN’S ASCENT

Juan Domingo Perón was aged forty-nine at the time, had a brilliant career behind him, and was familiar with the intelligence services. Between 1939 and 1941, he’d been to Europe on a mission for the Argentine army, basing himself in Italy. A great admirer of Mussolini, Perón had become persuaded that fascism was “history’s most extraordinary

4 Goni, *The Real Odessa*, 16.

and revolutionary social experience.”⁵ Upon returning to his country, he had become one of the promoters of the top-secret GOU and Argentina’s foreign policy.

Between 1941 and 1942, when it seemed as if Bolshevik Russia was about to succumb to Hitler’s offensive, the idea of peace talks aimed at promoting a new international balance matured in pro-German circles in Buenos Aires. Argentina, Spain, and the Vatican, united in a “peace triangle,” were supposed to encourage the creation of a bloc of Catholic nations. This was to safeguard the “spiritual values of civilization,” while also turning into a third, peacekeeping force between a nascent, national socialist New Europe and the Anglo-American empire. Received with much enthusiasm by both Spain and the Holy See, the idea of a peace triangle lost momentum as the Russian campaign dragged on. In January 1943, any hopes that a bloc of Catholic countries might be able to mediate between the Axis and the Allies came crashing against the Allies’ decision, made in Casablanca, to settle for nothing less than Germany’s unconditional surrender. However, GOU continued to believe that the Axis would win in the end, and—with a view to the June 1943 coup—had secured Hitler’s full support, as well as Franco’s and Mussolini’s backing, and the Vatican’s endorsement.⁶

After the coup, Perón began his climb to the top, acting as the champion of “justicialism.” This doctrine relied on the consensus of peasant masses and the urban proletariat to achieve “a socially just, economically free, and politically sovereign nation.”⁷ Owing to the success of the social reforms he promoted early on, which garnered him support from the unions and earned him great popularity, Perón strengthened his position at the beginning of 1945, becoming minister of war and vice president in Farrell’s government. Perón declared war on Germany on 27 March. By then, Hitler’s ship was already sinking. It was a twist that made it possible for Argentina to jump on the

5 Quoted in Cavalleri, *L'oro dei nazisti*, 48.

6 Goni, *The Real Odessa*, 39f.

7 Meding, *La ruta de los nazis en tiempo de Perón*, 70.

winners' bandwagon at the last second. This move, Perón later admitted, had been suggested by Berlin: "if Argentina becomes a belligerent country, it has the right to enter Germany when the end arrives; this means that our planes and ships would be in a position to render a great service. [...] That is how a great number of people were able to reach Argentina."⁸

FROM MADRID TO BUENOS AIRES

In the summer of 1945, huge demonstrations took place in Argentina's capital, organized by radical and communist opposition groups. The latter accused the government of complicity with Nazism, and demanded the head of Juan Perón, at the helm of several ministries and the powerful vice president. Forced to resign all his posts, Perón left Buenos Aires early in October, taking refuge in the vacation home of a close friend of his, the German magnate Ludwig Freude. The highest representative of the German community in Argentina, Freude himself was being charged with acting as a link between the Reich and Peronists in Argentina, and risked extradition, called for by the United States. The two friends organized their counterattack. On 13 October, the general turned himself in to the police. He was incarcerated on Martín García Island, on the Río de la Plata. Peronist militants and trade unions mobilized the masses. On 17 October, a huge crowd assembled in the Plaza de Mayo, forcing the government to set the prisoner free. That same evening, when Perón appeared on the balcony of the Casa Rosada, the executive mansion and office of the president, the people of Argentina effectively appointed him as the country's leader. Farrell's government remained in place until February 1946 in order to prepare the elections. Perón won by a landslide. Ironically, his triumph was due in part to the exceeding harshness of the campaign the United States conducted against the Peronist party.

8 Goni, *The Real Odessa*, 24.

But credit for his success went mostly to Ludwig Freude's generous financial contributions and to the work of the radio actress Eva Duarte, who had moved the masses with her powerful speeches.⁹ As soon as he was elected president, Perón resigned from the army, married Evita, and, in order to strengthen his partnership with the German magnate, took the latter's son, Rudi Freude, to the Casa Rosada, placing him at the helm of the president's Information Bureau.

Drawing inspiration largely from fascism, Perón launched the idea of a revolutionary third position between capitalism and communism. This was to be embodied in an Iberian bloc, destined to include the entire South American continent. Spain and Argentina, Perón believed, were "two bastions that pursued the same mission: to defend the thousand-year-old Christian civilization."¹⁰

As soon as a five-year reform plan designed to modernize the country was set in motion, Perón started making massive investments in the social, industrial, agricultural, and military fields. To create new industrial plants and strengthen the war machine, endowing it with the most modern and sophisticated weapons, the plan required the substantial immigration of specialized personnel—scientists, professors, engineers, and technicians. Argentina thus entered the competition with the war's great victors for the best German specialists. No small number of them appeared on the blacklists of people charged with war crimes, but Perón considered the International Tribunal at Nuremberg "a disgrace" and "an outrage history will not forgive!"¹¹ As a result, in addition to welcoming some of Germany's brightest minds in science and technology, pro-German Argentina also opened its doors to many former officers of the Reich, who would now serve as army, navy, and air force cadres, and to thousands of SS agents and Axis collaborators,

9 Evita owed her fame to the daily radio program *Toward a Better Future*, aimed at Argentina's poor families—the overwhelming majority of the population.

10 Gonzáles de Oleaga, "La alianza Franco-Perón," 663. Under the aegis of Perón, Franco, and Salazar, the Iberian bloc was to create, on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, a third force to oppose North American expansionism.

11 Statements made by Perón, in Goni, *The Real Odessa*, 100.

who would put their experience at the disposal of local espionage services and the new dictator's political police.

Thanks to the complicity of Francoist Spain, Axis countries and their satellites had already turned Madrid into a bridgehead to South America before the war was even over. Charles Lesca, a French war criminal of Argentine descent who had fled from France after the liberation of Paris, set up the first escape route to Argentina for SS secret agents in Madrid. Belgian collaborators were to report to three war criminals whose names appeared at the top of the Brussels blacklist, and who were now in the Spanish capital: René Lagrou, founder of the Flemish SS, Léon Degrelle, the head of the pro-Nazi Rexist Party, and Pierre Daye, that same group's parliamentary leader. Radu Ghenea, the Romanian ambassador to Madrid, stayed there for two years to protect Romanian fugitives, and then went on to Buenos Aires to continue along the same line with Perón's patronage. Two months before the war's end, the German-Argentine Carlos Fuldner—an adventurous former SS captain—arrived in Madrid bearing substantial assets, entrusted to him by Himmler's secret services to facilitate the great escape. Fuldner oversaw the clandestine emigration of Nazi criminals, scientists, and technicians up until 1947; once back in Buenos Aires, he collaborated with Rudi Freude's Information Bureau and became the Immigration Office's highest authority on the matter of German arrivals. The cardiologist Branko Benzon, the one-time Independent State of Croatia's ambassador to Berlin and Budapest, also arrived in Madrid shortly before the war's end, and handled the exfiltration of the Ustasha until March 1947, when he moved to Buenos Aires. In Argentina's capital, he served as personal physician to the president and his wife, and leader of the Croatian immigration.¹²

12 Goni, *The Real Odessa*, 151–53. One of Benzon's collaborators in the Croatian embassy in Berlin had been Father Krunoslav's brother Krešimir Draganović; after the defeat, he remained in hiding in Germany until February 1948, when he made it to Argentina.

PAX ROMANA

Between 1945 and 1947, several Ustasha units left Italy and headed for Argentina by way of Madrid, following the so-called Iberian route.¹³ According to the intelligence gathered by the Italian counterespionage unit, in the fall of 1945 the Vatican had asked Monsignor Bernardini, the nuncio in Berne, to set to work “so that certain Yugoslav citizens, who were wanted by Tito’s police, might be granted asylum in Spain.” Soon afterward, on the occasion of a Spanish pilgrimage to Rome, “about sixty Yugoslavs were sent off to Spain [...] bearing passports issued by the Spanish embassy to the Holy See.” In March 1946, another Yugoslav contingent left for Spain—and for South America from there—following “the same procedure.” Indeed, the Yugoslavs were smuggled out with the Spanish pilgrims and cardinals who had arrived “for the consistory.”¹⁴ On 10 April 1946, the newspaper *L’Unità* exposed a new escape plan prepared by the Vatican and the Spanish foreign affairs minister Artajo, “a well-known member of the Francoist Catholic Action.” “The Organization Pax Romana Exports War Criminals for Franco,” the communist newspaper headlined.¹⁵

A powerful international organization leading Catholic student federations in twenty-three countries, Pax Romana was committed to bringing aid to Eastern European students who had sought shelter in Germany. It also sent subsidies to those who had stayed behind in their home countries, and helped “Slovenes and Croats held in camps in Austria and Italy.”¹⁶ According to *L’Unità*, in view of a Pax Roma-

13 Clandestine emigration followed four routes: a northern route, from Sweden to South America; a Swiss route, the prerogative of scientists and technicians; the Iberian route; and, finally, the Italian route, which took the place of the Iberian one in 1947–48. See the cited studies in Meding, *La ruta de los nazis en tiempo de Perón*, and Goni, *The Real Odessa*.

14 AUSSME, Fondo Calderini, RGPT.CE, 347-315299, 26 April 1946, 2.

15 *L’Unità*, Rome, 10 April 1946.

16 *La Civiltà Cattolica* III (1948) 233–36, Cavalli S.I., *Collaborazione studentesca internazionale*. Established at Fribourg, Switzerland, in 1921 as a secretariat for Catholic student associations all over the world, Pax Romana originated the Mouvement international des étudiants catholiques (MIEC) and the Mouvement international intellectuels catholiques (MIIC) in 1947. Pax Romana had “a Cardinal Protector” and three ecclesiastic assistants expressing the

na congress in Barcelona, 1,500 students of various nationalities had departed from Genoa bearing “Vatican scholarships and documents.” Mixed in with the students, “former collaborators” of several Eastern European countries, that is, “iron guards, Ustasha, [...] and fascists of all denominations,” also took flight. The fugitives were covered by “the Spanish reporter Ruiz” and Monsignor Draganović, “a Bosnian who was, and still is, connected to Ante Pavelić,” the communist newspaper alleged. The former director of the Croatian radio in Zagreb and the former secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under Pavelić were listed among those who had fled.¹⁷ Three days later, the *Osservatore Romano*, the Holy See’s official paper, denied allegations that the Vatican was aiding fugitives, and defended the Church’s conduct in favor of “poor students persecuted by communism.” In the reply that followed on the communist newspaper, the list of those who had reportedly been helped to flee was lengthened with new names belonging to fugitives wanted by the Yugoslav government. Draganović was branded as “the recognized leader of the Ustasha in Rome,” and as he who concealed “dozens of fascists and of Yugoslav war criminals [...] in the Vatican and in extraterritorial convents.”¹⁸

As well as targeting Pax Romana and the Vatican, *L’Unità* lambasted Francoist Spain for harboring thousands of Nazis and collaborators.¹⁹ In the fall of 1946, Washington informed its embassy in Buenos Aires that German agents from Spain were “entering Argentina disguised as priests and deserters from Spanish ships.”²⁰ In order to block fugitives that were boarding the ships in Barcelona, the Anglo-Ameri-

“Holy See’s thought and directives.”

17 *L’Unità*, 10 April 1946. The “Ruiz” mentioned by the newspaper was actually Professor Joaquín Ruiz Jiménez, then president of the Spanish Pax Romana.

18 *L’Unità*, 16 April 1946. The list of fleeing fugitives included Zdravko Bubanj (a member of Pavelić’s personal guard), Zvonko Katalinić (Ustasha secret services agent), Luka Brainović, and Ljubomir Malis (fascist journalists). Dr. Verzovis—who, together with Cardinal Spellmann, was organizing “the flight to America of the two priests Jelenic and Petranović,” featured as war criminals on the Yugoslav list—was mentioned among Draganović’s guests.

19 “As is known, there are about 8,000 Nazis in Spain, 800 of whom are wanted by the Allies as war criminals” (*L’Unità*, 5 May 1946).

20 Goni, *The Real Odessa*, 76.

cans set up strict controls in the Strait of Gibraltar. From that moment on, many fugitives started cutting across the Iberian Peninsula in small groups, availing themselves of a Spanish Monastery Road, and boarding in the port of Cádiz, on the Atlantic.²¹

THE ITALIAN ROUTE

On 27 November 1945, Doctor Luigi Castineras, the Argentine Republic's new ambassador to the Holy See, presented his credentials to Pius XII, and reminded him of "the bonds uniting Argentina and the Holy See." In his turn the pope alluded to the communist threat saying that "Argentina [would] hardly be able to elude those clashes of ideas that [did] not stop at frontiers."²² In December, Pius XII summoned the Argentine bishop Antonio Caggiano to Rome to confer the cardinal's purple on him. Head of the Argentine Catholic Action group and the titular bishop of the diocese of Rosario, Caggiano had championed "a vehement anticommunist crusade" since the 1930s. The bishop of Rosario landed in Genoa in February 1946, accompanied by the elderly bishop of Tucuman, Agustin Barrère, who had also been long "obsessed with the fear [of] a Masonic-Communist plot." Aquilino Lopez—the new Argentine consul in Naples, and "wartime collaborator of Himmler's secret service in Madrid"—was there to greet them.²³

At the end of March, down with a bad case of the flu, which caused his elevation ceremony to be postponed, Monsignor Caggiano met with Cardinal Eugène Tisserant in Villa San Francesco, the official seat of the Pontifical Commission for Assistance. The French prelate, secretary of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches and an expert on Soviet matters, feared a new war, brought on by Moscow, might be about to break out. In his opinion, Russia would take over Western Europe, incorporating Germany into its war machine, as well as the

21 See Camarasa, *Organizzazione Odessa*, 19.

22 *La Civiltà Cattolica* IV (1945): 416, *Cronaca/Santa Sede* (not signed).

23 Goni, *The Real Odessa*, 94.

communist organizations active in Western countries.²⁴ Tisserant was convinced that, in order to stop Bolshevism, a cordon sanitaire made up of Catholic nations from the Baltic to the Mediterranean, the so-called Intermarium, needed to be set up as quickly as possible. Yet if a war did break out—as Caggiano, Barrère, and President Perón himself also predicted—South American communist parties would rise up at Moscow's bidding. This meant Argentina must also become a bastion defending the values of the Christian West. To this end, Tisserant was happy to point out to the two bishops certain "French persons, whose political attitude during the recent war [might] expose them, should they return to France, to harsh measures and private revenge." Thus, between March and April 1946, Caggiano and Barrère prompted Argentine consular authorities in Rome to grant visas to several Frenchmen eager to head to the Rio de la Plata, allegedly for reasons of tourism. Among the men recommended for visas, who soon took to the sea, were at least three war criminals sought by the French police: Marcel Boucher, Fernand de Menou, and Robert Pincemin.²⁵

Finally presented with his cardinal's purple, Caggiano went on a triumphal tour of Spain accompanied by the highest religious authorities and Catholic Action leaders. After meeting with Franco in Madrid, Caggiano and his following embarked on the *Cabo de Buena Esperanza* headed for Buenos Aires in the port of Cadiz on 9 May. The French engineer Emile Dewoitine, a renowned jet plane designer who had worked for the Axis during the war and was currently being sought by the French police on charges of espionage in favor of the enemy, also sailed away on that ship, with a Spanish passport and a first-class ticket.²⁶

After Caggiano and Barrère visited Rome, the diplomatic exchanges between the Vatican and Argentina intensified. Early in June 1946, the acting Vatican secretary of state Cardinal Montini summoned Am-

²⁴ Tisserant voiced these concerns and beliefs in a meeting with the US special agent William Gowen in Vatican City on 18 September 1946; quoted in Aarons and Loftus, *Ratlines*, 28.

²⁵ Tisserant to the Argentine embassy in Rome, 7 May 1946, in Goni, *The Real Odessa*, 95.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 97–98. In his Argentine laboratories, Dewoitine, who was hired by Perón with a handsome pay, developed the prototype for a jet plane. The latter proved unsatisfactory.

bassador Castineiras to express the pope's interest in arranging the emigration of certain men, "not only of Italians," toward the only country where the emigrants could find a "satisfactory solution to their needs." The Holy Father wanted "the Vatican's experts to get in touch with the Argentine experts to arrange a plan of action."²⁷

THE IMMIGRATION PLAN

An Immigration Office existed in Buenos Aires led, since 1943, by the anthropologist Santiago Peralta, a well-known Nazi supporter with ties to the colonels who had carried out the coup. Confirmed in his post by Perón, Peralta inaugurated a Human Potential Commission in the summer of 1946. This commission developed the country's new immigration policy, founded on anticommunism and anti-Semitism, on "laws of blood" and the gradual "scientific" remodeling of the Argentine population—that is, on a "Nazi-style racial blueprint" that was to "guide the nation without interruption for centuries."²⁸ The first effects of the newly established immigration policy and collaboration between Argentina and the Vatican soon followed. On 30 October 1946, the Franciscan friar Blaž Stefanić of the Bari Basilica in Buenos Aires and Vladimir Bilobrk, a high Franciscan representative of the Croatian community in Argentina, wrote a letter to President Perón, entreating him to take action in behalf of the Croatian refugees confined in Europe's camps. The heartfelt plea was "underwritten and [came] strongly recommended by the cardinal of the Argentine capital, Santiago Copelo."²⁹ The next day, Stefanić got the Immigration Office to allow entrance to Argentina for 250 Croats, identified merely as masons, farmers, mechanics, priests, and university students. The actual

27 Secret Letter no. 144, sent by the Argentine ambassador to the foreign affairs minister, 13 June 1946, in Goni, *The Real Odessa*, 99.

28 Human Potential Commission papers, in Goni, *The Real Odessa*, 109. Regarding Peralta's virulent anti-Semitism, see *ibid.*, 39–43.

29 Casazza, *La fuga dei nazisti*, 94.

names of the emigrants-to-be were subsequently provided in Rome, at the bidding of “Croatian organizations in Munich, Salzburg, and Rome”—effectively Ustasha organizations. The Roman branch of the Croatian Caritas then sent the list back to its counterpart in Buenos Aires, which supplied it to the Argentine Immigration Office.³⁰ On 27 November, the Argentine authorities sent their consent to the Roman consulate. The latter summoned the people on the list, or others acting on their behalf, in order to issue the necessary emigration visas. Any candidates who had lost their passports need only produce International Red Cross travel papers.

In the wake of the chaos that followed the war’s end, the IRC had started issuing papers that served as passport substitutes “to all those people forced, in one way or another, to flee from their countries of residence by the war.” The holders of these papers could use them to emigrate, provided “the country they were currently living in granted them permission to exit, and the country they intended to relocate to granted them permission to enter.”³¹ The Croatian Caritas, affiliated to the IRC, had no difficulty obtaining such travel papers for all of the people under its care. Italian authorities, on the other hand, were only too pleased to rid themselves of the heavy burden, and granted emigration visas to anyone who requested them.

On 29 December 1946, 250 “Croats” embarked in Genoa on the steamboat *Andrea Gritti* headed for Buenos Aires, inaugurating the Italian route, which replaced the now too-dangerous Iberian route. Directing the entire operation behind the scenes there had been Monsignor Draganović. In a note presented to the Holy See, the Yugoslav authorities made it known that three former ministers of the Ustasha government—Vjekoslav Vrančić, Stjepan Hefer, and Ante Nikšić—as well as several other war criminals “sought by the Allies in Italy, so

30 Holger Meding’s interview with the journalist Marko Sinovčić, 12 March 1990 (in Meding, *La ruta de los nazis en tiempo de Perón*, 117). In 1947, Sinovčić was the Croatian Caritas representative to the Buenos Aires Immigration Office.

31 Meding, *La ruta de los nazis en tiempo de Perón*, 111.

that they could be turned in to Yugoslavia” had departed on the *Andrea Gritti* using false identities.³²

The Delegación Argentina de Inmigración en Europa (DAIE) had meanwhile been set up in Buenos Aires, and an expert commission had immediately set off for Rome with the task of “organizing a central office for the selection of European candidates.” Perón placed the Salesian José Clemente Silva in charge of the commission. In addition to being the chaplain of the Argentine army, the latter was also the brother of General Oscar Silva, head of the president’s military secretariat. Father Silva’s commission opened DAIE’s European central office in Rome, and started working with the authorities of the various governments to lay out a multi-year emigration plan. With much emphasis, Perón had announced that Argentina was prepared to welcome 4 million immigrants, taking in as many as 30,000 people a month. This announcement aroused great hope, so much so that on 16 March 1947 the *Osservatore Romano* reported that Europe had come down with “Argentine fever.”³³ However, a year went by before Argentina and Italy found an agreement for Italian emigration, and six more months passed before a similar agreement was made with Spain. Results were ultimately far less impressive than promised. Argentina took in 364,000 immigrants in all between 1945 and 1950, less than 10 percent of the 4 million people Perón had boasted about letting into the country.³⁴

Whatever the formal agreements with the European government authorities might have called for, the DAIE’s prevailing concern was to direct the Eastern European refugees that had poured into Germany, Austria, and Italy toward Argentina, along with the Ustasha and the collaborators of the Axis’s former satellite countries, Italian fascists, and, most of all, German citizens eager to emigrate. The plan

32 MSPS, Fond PA, fasc. 123, d. 1, sig. b. 43902-S6, 1947. The list included, among others, the Ustasha general Matija Canić, the executioner Galić, and Pavelić’s close collaborator Vlaho Žarko.

33 Meding, *La ruta de los nazis en tiempo de Perón*, 76–77.

34 Holger Meding provides this figure, based on the official data supplied by Argentine authorities (Meding, *La ruta de los nazis en tiempo de Perón*, 193).

conceived by the winners of the war to denazify and reeducate Germany entailed, among other things, that no German should be allowed to settle abroad. US occupation authorities were the strictest, also on account of the fact that the United States dreaded that Nazism might be reborn in Argentina and spread throughout South America from there. Germans, particularly those compromised by dealings with the past regime, thus had no other choice but to emigrate clandestinely. Nevertheless, making the most of the travel papers liberally provided by the IRC, the DAIE managed to relocate tens of thousands of them.³⁵

The men in the DAIE and the officials of the Argentine consulates in Europe granted visas only to people who met certain criteria. They had to have significant skills in science, management, or technical matters, particularly pertaining to the field of war. Alternatively, they would need a military résumé worthy of the Wehrmacht, or documented experience in Axis intelligence services and similar activities. Two requisites were indispensable for all. Successful candidates for emigration had to be staunchly anticommunist in their political convictions, and they had to be willing to fight under Perón's leadership to protect the spiritual values of the Christian West. In light of these requirements, it goes without saying that a large part of the 364,000 Eastern and Western European nationals taken in by Buenos Aires in the span of six years had unresolved business with the law.

IN GENOA

After establishing its central office, the DAIE opened up a branch in Genoa, with support from the local Argentine consulate. From that moment on, the Genoese port—already a hub for escape routes to Spain, Africa, and the Middle East—became the starting point for departures to Argentina. Arranging the emigration of thousands of people was a

35 According to official Argentine data, between 1945 and 1950 about 50,000 German and Austrian citizens entered Argentina, and there were 30,000 more between 1951 and 1955.

taxing job. Religious organizations, Catholic associations, and trusted men from the Pontifical Commission for Assistance set to work with great dedication. The first order of business was welcoming and giving aid to the many refugees and undocumented immigrants arriving in Genoa from every direction. Archbishop Giuseppe Siri presided over a relief association, the Auxilium, active in providing assistance to the poor and in helping them emigrate to the Americas since before the war. The Auxilium became the PCA's Genoese section in 1944, when it started dealing intensely with war refugees and asylum seekers. It had "thirty-eight food distribution centers spread throughout Genoa," and "a fleet of motor vehicles for the transportation of war refugees." Casa San Giorgio—a 400-bed relief center for migrants and war refugees—was opened in 1947 under the Auxilium's aegis. A year later, in 1948, the National Committee for Emigration to Argentina was set up to "assist refugees in carrying out the necessary procedures to acquire the documents with which to embark in Genoa and disembark in Buenos Aires."³⁶

Stand-ins for Draganović, for Hudal, and for the Roman religious centers, likewise branches of the Pontifical Commission for Assistance, were active within these organizations of the Genoese curia, overseeing the emigration of Ukrainians, Hungarians, Lithuanians, Romanians, Germans, Austrians, and others.³⁷ In the port of Genoa, these liaison religious carried out tasks that Genoese priests or Argentine officials would have been hard pressed to take on themselves. They filled out the files for the Red Cross and DAIE, and questioned all the refugees in their native languages, verifying the soundness of their stories, exposing spies infiltrated by the Yugoslav police purporting to be Ustasha, and so on.

The Croatian reverend Karlo Petranović—whom we have already encountered in Croatia, where he served as the Ustasha military chap-

³⁶ Casazza, *La fuga dei nazisti*, 92, 136, and 140. The motor vehicles in question were six trucks allowed to travel bearing CV license plates and Vatican flags by concession of the pope. ADSS, vol. 10, doc. 449, 541–42.

³⁷ See Dossier La Vista, Part 3, Chapter 2.

lain, as well as in Austria and Trieste, where he worked to exfiltrate fellow Ustasha—was among the most active such religious in Genoa. Petranović had shown up before the archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Ildefonso Schuster, late in 1945, bearing a recommendation by the archbishop of Graz, Ferdinand Pawlikowski. He had stayed in Milan for a few months, bringing aid to refugees and undocumented immigrants there,³⁸ before finally arriving in Genoa with a letter of presentation from Cardinal Schuster to Monsignor Siri, and becoming Draganović's stand-in in the Auxilium. Reverend Karlo Petranović, known in Genoa as Don Carlo, welcomed thousands of emigrants over the course of six years, and prepared the papers necessary for their departure by sea. Most such emigrants were "Croats," as in the case of Pavelić and his ministers, but others were "Germans," like Erich Priebke. In Genoa, Petranović was known as the Croat who moved back and forth between the Auxilium and the National Committee for Emigration to Argentina, availing himself of "Siri's black Mercedes with a Vatican City license plate." He often traveled between Genoa and Rome at night, and returned, "always at night, carrying a diplomatic pouch."³⁹

Hungarian refugees could count on Lajos Dömötör, a Franciscan from Budapest, who, during the war, had been a "military chaplain to the Nazi-allied Hungarian army."⁴⁰ He had arrived in Genoa in September 1944, and continued to live there into the early 1950s. Known in the city as Father Edoardo, Dömötör lived in the Franciscan monastery attached to the church of Saint Anthony. He assisted many fellow Hungarians during his time in Genoa. In June 1950, before a Red Cross official, he even signed and vouched for the authenticity of the documents in the name of Ricardo Klement that ultimately allowed Adolf Eichmann to set sail for Buenos Aires.

38 In addition to the archbishopric, Father Gemelli's Jesuits and Father Zucchi's Franciscans were also at work delivering aid to the refugees. SS colonel Walter Rauff, whom we've also already encountered, set up his sorting center in Milan's suburbs in those same months.

39 Casazza, *La fuga dei nazisti*, 98–99. Regarding Petranović, see also Aarons and Loftus, *Ratlines*, 113–19, and Goni, *The Real Odessa*, 235–36.

40 Casazza, *La fuga dei nazisti*, 44–45.

In addition to taking in the postulants and to preparing their files, these most trusted religious also had to determine, together with the DAIE, on which ship and date they should embark. The Italian passenger fleet had been destroyed during the war, but by 1946 the Genoese shipowner Giacomo Costa, a generous supporter of the Auxilium, had completed two such vessels: the *Maria C.* and the *Anna C.* would ferry tens of thousands of refugees to Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay. Another Genoese shipowner active in Buenos Aires, Alberto Dodero, let his friend Juan Domingo Perón use his fleet. Dodero had become Argentina's top shipowner between the two world wars, when his navigation company, which operated primarily along river routes, had absorbed the Nicolás Mihanovic Company, taking over its monopoly on maritime trade between Montevideo and Buenos Aires.⁴¹ At the war's end, Dodero further acquired six "Liberty" ships no longer in use by the United States Navy to deliver wheat and foodstuffs to war-torn Europe. When the DAIE offices opened shop, Dodero's vessels started returning to the motherland laden with emigrants. Erich Priebke, who embarked in Genoa in October 1948 with help from Father Petranović, later recollected: "The daughter of the owner of the Argentine navigation company Dodero had married a Croat. After he took the reins of the business into his own hand, on each ship headed to Argentina there were always places reserved for Croats who wanted to emigrate."⁴² The manager who favored "Croats" was the son of the shipowner Mihanovic. In addition to the two companies, the two families had merged as well.

A part of the refugees displaced in southern Italy's camps weighed anchor from the port of Naples. In the fall of 1947, a thousand or so refugees were awaiting to be embarked in Bagnoli's transit camp. A confidential note from the Yugoslav authorities to the Italian foreign affairs minister listed (either the real names of or aliases used by) "nineteen

⁴¹ Cavalleri, *L'oro dei nazisti*, 119–20.

⁴² From Erich Priebke's autobiography *Vae Victis*, cited in Casazza, *La fuga dei nazisti*, 91.

Ustasha and Chetnik war criminals,” wanted by Belgrade, who were prepared to “embark for Argentina,” as indeed they did soon after.⁴³ In Naples, the DAIE availed itself of the collaboration of the Argentine consul and former Nazi spy Aquilino Lopez; as for the Ustasha, they could count on Croatian and Bosnian friars living in Franciscan monasteries in Naples and environs to act as liaison religious.

The DAIE did not merely grant visas. It also carried out an actual recruitment campaign throughout Europe. The former SS captain Carlos Fuldner managed this very delicate section of the DAIE. Constantly on the go between European capitals, Fuldner flashed an Argentine passport describing him as “the president’s special emissary.” The one-time SS captain recruited German specialists for the Argentine arms industry, as well as former SS officers for Rudi Freude’s Information Office and for the Argentine armed forces. Fuldner had a travel agency in Buenos Aires, Vianord, which processed the paperwork for immigrants departing from Sweden, and provided them with visas and tickets on airplanes or on Dodero’s ships.⁴⁴ Scientists and technicians recruited in Sweden preferably flew out from Switzerland. Those fleeing from Germany through the Brenner Pass were taken in by one of Fuldner’s aides in Bolzano, the former Tyrolese colonel of the Salò army Franz Ruffinengo, who dispatched them to the DAIE in Genoa. Ruffinengo worked in close contact with Draganović’s network and with Reinhard Kops (who operated under the alias of Juan Maler), a one-time Wehrmacht secret service officer now serving as a middleman between Alois Hudal and the DAIE in Genoa.⁴⁵

When the ships dropped anchor in the port of Buenos Aires, the immigrants spent a few days in a large building from the early 1900s, known as the Hotel de Inmigrantes, located in the Darsena Norte. The newcomers were accommodated in large dormitories and received

43 MSPS, Fond PA, fasc. 81, d. 7, sig. b. 425513, 1948.

44 Goni, *The Real Odessa*, 275f.

45 Ruffinengo and Kops went to Argentina in 1947; the former dedicated his time to bringing Nazis and fascists into the country, while the latter became the editor in chief of the neo-Nazi magazine *Der Weg*.

meals in a huge refectory equipped with hundreds of tables. They underwent all the required health checks, and the necessary red tape was carried out in compliance with the law. To this end, a personal file was opened for each one of them, and passed on the Immigration Office as soon as all the inspections were done. It was the Immigration Office that granted entry visas to Argentina.⁴⁶ Higher-profile guests were spared the promiscuity of the Hotel de Inmigrantes and the annoyance of inspection in several ways. As soon as the ships they were on entered the harbor, the port police sent a motorboat out to collect them, and took them to a different landing spot. Otherwise, an Immigration Office representative might wait for them at the wharf with presigned entry visas to greet them and escort them away.⁴⁷ Yet how could the right people be singled out among the thousand or so luggage-encumbered passengers coming down the boarding ladder, without drawing unwanted attention? As recalled by one refugee who reached Argentina on the *Cabo de Hornos* in August 1948, shortly before their ship moored in Buenos Aires, a great many Germans and Croats went down to their cabins, and later turned up disguised as Franciscan friars. The same script was followed on nearly every ship.

According to recently declassified fragmentary documents held in the Immigration Office in Buenos Aires, at least 7,250 people catalogued as Croatian emigrants reached Argentina between 1947 and 1949.⁴⁸ Most of them were Ustasha fugitives who had served under Pavelić's criminal dictatorship.

46 As recounted in detail by Goni (*The Real Odessa*, 159–60), thousands of compromising files were burned, both during Perón's time and subsequently, making a systematic reconstruction of clandestine immigration to Argentina between 1945 and 1955 impossible.

47 Much like the Pontifical Commission for Assistance, the Immigration Office was divided into twenty different sections—one per country of origin of the immigrants—entrusted to representatives of each nationality. The office had three directors: Santiago Peralta, forced to resign in 1947 on account of his intense anti-Semitism, Pablo Diana, and, finally, Enrique Gonzales (see Meding, *La ruta de los nazis en tiempo de Perón*, 232–33).

48 Casazza, *La fuga dei nazisti*, 44–45.

EVITA'S TRIP AND THE BIRTH OF THE SARE

In the summer of 1947, Maria Eva Duarte de Perón set out on the much publicized Rainbow Tour of Europe, named thus because it was supposed to spark the hope of a radiant future for Argentina in the hearts of many. A “cheering crowd of 150,000 *descamisados*” saw Evita off at the Buenos Aires airport on 6 June. She departed very much like a queen, with sixty-four suitcases full of gorgeous gowns and jewelry, and with a retinue of fifteen people. This number did not include her personal confessor, the Jesuit Hernán Benítez; he had gone on to Rome before her to make arrangements for her welcome in the Vatican and schedule her meetings. The shipowner Dodero, on the other hand, was among those who accompanied Evita that day. He had financed the trip, and was to spend the following two months alongside La Dama de la Esperanza (The Lady of Hope). While Franco was bestowing the Cross of the Order of Isabella upon his wife in Madrid, Juan Perón returned seven ships seized during the war to Italy, laden with 72,000 tons of wheat as a gift to the Italian people.⁴⁹ Evita arrived in Ciampino on 26 June, greeted by the Italian foreign affairs minister Carlo Sforza and a multitude of celebrities and reporters.⁵⁰ The morning after, she was received “in private audience by His Holiness, who engaged her in fatherly conversation for half an hour,” and gifted her with “a precious rosary contained in an artistic case.”⁵¹ Following the meeting, the pontiff praised Argentina’s generosity toward Italy,

49 Cavalleri, *L'oro dei nazisti*, 76, 81 and 84.

50 That same evening, a festive demonstration to welcome Evita staged in front of the Argentine embassy was ruined by a large picket organized by left-wing forces (*ibid.*, 85–86). Other demonstrations of protest took place in Milan and in Genoa, while the leftist press accused the De Gasperi government of collusion with Peronist fascism.

51 Eva Perón had hoped to emerge from her meeting with the pope bearing the title of “Pontifical Marquise.” Some photos depicting Eva Duarte back when she was a cabaret actress, forwarded to the Vatican by an anti-Peronist Argentine prelate, persuaded the Holy Father to gift her instead with a more appropriate instrument of penance. Twenty-four hours later, however, Evita was delivered the diamond-studded Great Cross of the Order of Pius IX at the Argentine embassy.

and warmly thanked the nation for “all it [had] done in favor of the Pontifical Commission for Assistance.”⁵²

After meeting with Cardinal Schuster in Milan, and with Lombardy’s entrepreneurial aristocracy at Villa d’Este, Evita flew out to Lisbon, and even found time for a secret meeting with Umberto II of Savoy, in exile in Cascais.⁵³ Paris was next. Here, after signing a commercial treaty with the French foreign affairs minister Bidault granting France substantial credit to purchase wheat and meat from Argentina, the Legion of Honor was conferred on her. From France, the *señora* went to Switzerland, where federal authorities and wealthy bankers greeted her.⁵⁴ Apparently, the Dama de la Esperanza deposited substantial assets into personal boxes in Switzerland. After his wife’s death, Perón unsuccessfully tried to retrieve those assets, bitterly concluding: “Switzerland is where you meet all those who steal from others.”⁵⁵ Evita’s tour was brought to an end ahead of time, perhaps on account of the early signs of the disease that would consume the Argentine first lady in a few short years. Still, it was instrumental in letting Perón intensify his political and economic relations with Europe. Further, the Argentine president was able to exploit the “Rainbow Tour” to continue ferrying clandestine migrants back to his country.

Between 1947 and 1948, the emigrant-smuggling operations gained so much momentum that Perón felt compelled to set up a specific agency for the purpose of welcoming his most important guests into Argentina. Thus was born the Society in Argentina for the Reception of Europeans (SARE), which established its headquarters

52 *La Civiltà Cattolica* III (1947): 174, *Cronaca/Santa Sede* (not signed).

53 According to a confidential report to the Portuguese foreign affairs minister, “Evita allegedly spoke with Umberto about a case containing jewels estimated to be worth 100 million dollars,” asking him for advice as to their “placement.” See Cavalleri, *L’oro dei nazisti*, 105.

54 *Ibid.*, 112–16. Leftist movements targeted Evita in France, too, and in Switzerland she was greeted by tomato and rock throwing.

55 The quote is from Perón’s memoirs, cited in Cavalleri, *L’oro dei nazisti*, 126. Isabel Vincent (*L’oro dell’Olocausto*, 222), speaks of “60 million dollars” deposited by Evita on a personal Swiss account in 1947.

in Buenos Aires, in an old building owned by the archbishopric.⁵⁶ The SARE's statute was drafted on 29 June 1948 by a group of "refugees" who became the representatives of the various nationalities within the new organization. Belgium's representatives were Pierre Daye and René Lagrou, two criminals wanted by their country's justice system. Croatia's man was Doctor Branko Benzon, Pavelić's former ambassador to Berlin. Another war criminal, Robert Pincemin, handled French fugitives. Two men—whose known names, Haas and Hinrichsen, may have been aliases—were delegated for Germany and Austria. Italy's man was Eugenio Morreale, Mussolini's former ambassador to Madrid and, between the two wars, his trusted agent for secret relations with Pavelić. Romania's representative was Radu Ghenea, the collaborationist government's former ambassador to Madrid. Slovakia's delegate was Ferdinand Durcansky, wanted for war crimes and for carrying out persecutions. Finally, Hungary's man was Monsignor Ferenc Luttor, the Hungarian diplomat in the Holy See during the war, and later the Hungarian representative within the Pontifical Commission for Assistance in Rome, who had landed in Argentina in April 1947.⁵⁷

The newborn society started working in accord with the Casa Rosada's Information Office and with the DAIE in Europe. As Pierre Daye would later write, the SARE had been established to "procure for our endangered friends on the Old Continent visas and resources for immigration to Argentina." Thanks to the "generosity" of Perón's government, the SARE managed to "save thousands of friends and even strangers."⁵⁸

56 Cardinal Santiago Luis Copello was Buenos Aires's archbishop, as well as papal legate to the Argentine government. He shared Perón's "intense dislike for both 'atheistic Communism' and capitalism." See Goni, *The Real Odessa*, 177.

57 Ibid. See also Appendix A of the already-mentioned Dossier La Vista regarding "organizations in Rome engaged in or suspected of being involved in the clandestine emigration of refugees."

58 From Pierre Daye's unpublished memoirs, quoted in Goni, *The Real Odessa*, 178.

PAVELIĆ'S DEPARTURE

After moving between one hiding place in Rome and the next, and after spending a long time in a Jesuit house in Naples, Pavelić embarked from Genoa on 11 October 1948 using an International Red Cross passport in the name of the Hungarian engineer Pal Aranjós. The visa granted by the Argentine consulate in Rome was dated 5 July 1947. Everything had thus been ready for quite some time. Pavelić had indeed tried to depart at least once before, in March 1948, with help from the DAIE. A coded letter from the Spanish journalist Victor de la Serna to Pierre Daye reveals as much. Speaking of a race car that needed to be sent to Argentina, De la Serna wrote: "We've nonetheless painted the fins and placed big headlights on it [that] make it look different for anyone who has not seen it run too often in the many European races in which it participated."⁵⁹ Sure enough, Pavelić was made to look different in the photograph featured on the Spanish engineer's passport: he wore large eyeglasses, and sported a goatee on his chin and huge black mustaches. Yet it had not been possible to see the race car off as planned on account of a Balkan interference, that is to say, a countermove by the UDBA. Mrs. Pavelić, however, had arrived in Buenos Aires without difficulty early in May, after boarding the *Ugolino Vivaldi* in Genoa with two of her children using a passport in the name of a Mrs. Flejos.⁶⁰

Finally, the *poglavnik* took flight as well, and did so rather in haste, for the situation was spinning out of control in Italy. On 23, 24, and 26 September 1948, an investigative report had appeared on the Roman newspaper *Repubblica*, causing quite a stir. The first article, titled "Pavelić, the Croatian Duce, Lives in Italy Undisturbed," decried the following: "A mysterious and invisible protection enjoyed by the Ustaša has always misled the public opinion on their crimes, preventing

59 From Pierre Daye's papers held in Brussels' CEGES, quoted in Goni, *The Real Odessa*, 223.

60 Casazza, *La fuga dei nazisti*, 123. The eldest daughter Višnja, who had married Vilko Pečnikar, would follow in their footsteps later.

their punishment. [...] Still alive, free, and active is the first, and in any case the most brutal war criminal, the *poglavnik* Ante Pavelić, responsible, among other things, for the slaughter of 700,000 human beings (women, elderly, children) guilty of having been born Orthodox Christians or Jews.”⁶¹ The cruelty of the Croatian “Duce” was stigmatized by the macabre reference to the basket of human eyes the writer Curzio Malaparte claimed to have seen in Pavelić’s office in Zagreb at the time of the dictatorship.⁶²

The second article retraced the story of Pavelić’s loot, kept safe in Switzerland and accessed from Rome with help from a “providential” *longa manus* (long arm), which also favored the emigration of “Ustasha criminals.” The third article was titled “The General Command of the Ustasha Is Based in Two Roman Monasteries. The Operative Section Answers to Klagenfurt; the Terrorist [Section Answers] to Trieste.” The journalist had clearly been able to consult a great many UDBA dossiers, for he provided detailed information on the entire Ustasha organization active in Italy, Austria, and Yugoslavia alongside the crusaders, further naming monasteries and Roman institutions the Ustasha hid or assembled in under the direction of “Pavelić’s right-hand man,” the reverend Krunoslav Draganović “exiled Serbs called the gray eminence.”⁶³ A few days later, Pavelić reached Genoa in secret and embarked on the *Sestriere*, where a first-class cabin had been booked for him.

THE MONASTERY ROAD AND THE AMERICAN RATLINE

The stir caused by the investigative report featured in *Repubblica*, and the ensuing questions in parliament, forced the Italian counterespionage unit to launch an inquiry into the alleged illicit transits. In less

61 The three articles were signed by Titta Foti. *Repubblica*, 23 September 1948, Foti, *Pavelic, il “duce” croato*.

62 Malaparte, *Kaputt*. In the later edition by Milan’s publisher Garzanti (1988), the story titled “Un paniere di ostriche” (A basket of oysters) spans pages 290–300.

63 *Repubblica*, 24 September 1948, Foti, *Al sicuro in Svizzera*, and *Repubblica*, 26 September 1948, Foti, *Il comando generale*.

than two months, the investigation confirmed the existence of the Monastery Road the American secret services and UDBA had been talking about for two years. The counterespionage unit in Verona verified that the Antonianum, a Franciscan monastery in Bolzano, was a “port of call for Austrian and German elements, generally compromised with the past Nazi regime, who entered Italy clandestinely through the Brenner.” In the Antonianum, these foreigners received “moral and material aid, as well as useful support in finding temporary lodging in Alto Adige,” where they sojourned until they could be “sent to Rome [...] or to Genoa to embark.” There were about sixty Franciscans in the monastery, “almost all of them passionately pro-German.” Notable among them was Father Patrich. In his capacity as representative of Southern and Northern Tyrolese with the Caritas and the PCA, he managed two relief offices, one of them in Bolzano and the other in Innsbruck.⁶⁴

Investigating the network both upstream and downstream of the Antonianum, the Italian counterespionage unit traced its workings, from Austria to the Roman monasteries, and singled out the key players in its main hubs—clerics of various nationalities, former SS officers who often concealed their true identities under aliases, supporters of the Italian Social Republic, and all manner of traffickers, double-dealers, fronts, and smugglers. In a report dated 21 November 1948, the head of the center in Verona called attention to the transit along the Brenner Railway of “a party of fifty-two foreigners of various nationalities coming from Salzburg and headed for Rome.” Led by “one Vindulić Ivo, an otherwise unidentified Yugoslav,” the party had been greeted by Ivo Omrčanin, who, “at no charge,” had provided the travelers with “food and a train ticket from the Brenner to Rome.”⁶⁵ The list of fifty-two travelers featured several Germans, Poles, Bulgarians,

64 AUSSME, Fondo Calderini, RGPT. CE 360, f. 328695–96, Attività dei frati francescani in Bolzano, Verona, li 3 ottobre 1948.

65 Ibid., f. 328680–81. Doctor Ivo Omrčanin was a lawyer at the Roman Rota, and lived in Rome in the Franciscan monastery in Via San Paolo alla Regola. A former diplomat for the NDH government and a journalist, he had graduated from the Gregorian University.

Czechs, and seven Croats, one of whom, Slavko Cesarić, was a former general of Pavelić's army.⁶⁶ The counterespionage unit in Verona prompted other units to follow the party's tracks, and yet nothing more was ever known of the fifty-two men—a drop in the ocean. However, the counterespionage unit in Rome carried out “careful investigations” on the network, and, six months later, reported back to Verona that “the existence of an organization for the clandestine emigration of Nazi fascists to South America” was “confirmed by a number of sources.” This organization, the Roman unit further reported, was “sustained by organs of the Holy See,” and its activities were known “to the public security authority as well, which never felt it needed to intervene with measures of any kind, though.”⁶⁷ The message was clear. The Italian government had no intention of closing its barn doors to stop its horses from bolting.

The Italian police did not merely adopt a laissez-faire policy. In some cases, it also lent a hand in order to facilitate the comings and goings. For instance, this happened when the 430th CIC detachment of the US 5th Army, active in Salzburg since May 1945, started exfiltrating Soviet deserters from Austria in the course of a secret operation called Ratline.⁶⁸ For two years, under James V. Milano's command, the CIC unit had carried out multiple tasks. It had hunted former Nazis, protected American occupation forces, kept Austrian politicians under surveillance, and watched over Soviet movements. Yet as tensions between the two blocs quickly started worsening, opposing the Soviet menace soon became the most pressing matter confronting the US high command. The 430th CIC detachment set previous activities aside, fo-

66 Ibid., f. 328682-83, Appendice: “Elenco delle persone transitate dal Brennero, alle ore 18 del 23 ottobre 1948.”

67 Ibid., f. 328630 and 218636, Centro CS Roma and Centro CS Verona, 24 May 1949.

68 Aarons and Loftus, *Ratlines*, 248. A ratline, the authors wrote, is the rope ladder to the top of the ship's mast—the last safe place when the ship is sinking. The literature on the escape of war criminals through Italy has often used the word “ratline” to describe the entire phenomenon, a cause for some confusion with regard to roles and responsibilities. The American ratline was but a marginal aspect of the escape machine put into place for the extraction of Nazis, Ustasas, Fascists and their collaborators, known as the “Monastery Road.”

cusing on the new task of acquiring intelligence on communist organizations and on the Red Army. Major Milano's unit effectively specialized in the recruitment of anti-Soviet spies.⁶⁹ Both real (or professed) Red Army fugitives and Eastern European refugees—one-time Nazi collaborators now repurposed as freedom fighters—were recruited under the generic label of Soviet deserters.⁷⁰ The CIC offered all these men cover in Austria in exchange for their services, as well as assurances that they would be led to safe shores when the time was right. The United States government objected to any kind of emigration, though, and particularly to clandestine emigration, thus placing an obstacle before the CIC. Unwilling to get their hands dirty with the illicit trafficking, the American military command decided to outsource the job. In the summer of 1947, the CIC agent Paul Lyon went to Rome and, using various intermediaries, managed to reach Draganović, who had already helped several kinds of European refugees flee in secret to various South American countries.⁷¹ The problem with Soviet deserters was passed on to the Croatian helmsman, and thereby solved. In exchange for a generous compensation in dollars, Draganović took the illegal emigrants under his custody at the Austrian border, got them into Genoa, and embarked them on the ships headed for Argentina, Brazil, or Paraguay.

No one could have ensured greater discretion and efficiency than Monsignor Draganović. Americans were so grateful they dubbed him the "Good Father." James Milano was a scrupulous officer, though, and worked hard to protect his Ratline from undue interference, particularly at border crossings. Building on his Italian origins, Milano managed to win the trust of General Giovanni Bersanti, the director of the Ital-

69 Milano and Brogan, *Soldiers, Spies and the Ratline*, 41. To conduct its operations in the Soviet zone, the 430th CIC employed a road transport company based in Melk, a city known for its ancient abbey. "The archbishop designated a Franciscan friar [...] to sit on the board of the company to look after his interests" (ibid., 150).

70 Aarons and Loftus, *Ratlines*, 251.

71 Informal note titled "History of the Italian Ratlines, 10 April 1950, Paul Lyon," quoted in Aarons and Loftus, *Ratlines*, 248.

ian border police and customs services. Bersanti was an opera enthusiast, and Milano invited him and his wife to the Salzburg festival, treating them to a week's stay in an excellent hotel. The general committed to making sure the Italian police did not get in the way of the American operation, further providing the head of the 430th CIC detachment with a list of trusted border police officers, in the event that their services became necessary. The following year, the invitation to Salzburg was renewed, and this time the general and his wife arrived in the Austrian city in the company of "a high officer of the Italian police."⁷²

An incident in the fall of 1948 almost compromised the American operation. Two deserters who had embarked on a ship in Genoa quarreled with the customs agents upon arriving in Valparaíso and were sent back to their port of origin. Two customs officials took them in their custody in Genoa, and reembarked them with new documents on a ship headed for Buenos Aires covering up all signs of what had transpired. James Milano thanked them by gifting them with two brand-new American jeeps.⁷³ The Italian-American major left Salzburg in 1949. The matter of the deserters fell on Colonel Lewis Perry, who had previously worked in Trieste with Pavelić's men on the Crusaders' front.⁷⁴ Perry gave the operation a new code name, but continued to avail himself of the "Good Father" and of his network.

In March 1951, Draganović went to the train station in Genoa in person to greet a high-profile client, for whom he would later receive \$1,400 from the Americans. It was Klaus Barbie, the former head of the Gestapo in various areas of occupied France. Wanted by the French police as a war criminal, Barbie had to answer for "4,352 homicides, the deportation to concentration camps of 7,591 Jews [...] and the arrest of 14,311 members of the resistance, many of whom were tortured by him personally."⁷⁵ Captured by the Americans in 1945, the Butcher of Lyons

⁷² Milano and Brogan, *Soldiers, Spies and the Ratline*, 46, 57, and 62.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 2–6, and 57.

⁷⁴ Aarons and Loftus, *Ratlines*, 145–47.

⁷⁵ Camarasa, *Organizzazione Odessa*, 247.

had become a CIC informant. To elude the pressing calls for his extradition by the French government, Colonel Perry had placed him in the care of the “Good Father.” Draganović went to Genoa’s train station in person to receive Barbie, arranged his stay in a good hotel, and accompanied him to the Bolivian consulate, which granted him an entry visa, and to the Red Cross, which issued him a passport. The two documents were in the name of the refugee Klaus Altmann, whose identity the Croatian reverend vouched for. Barbie and Draganović then went to the DAIE to secure a transit visa for Argentina. The Argentine officials welcomed them with a stentorian “*Heil Hitler!*” Fearing a setup, Barbie was hesitant to answer, but then he realized the greeting was entirely sincere. On 22 March 1951, before embarking on the ocean liner *Corrientes* headed for Buenos Aires, Barbie thanked the “Good Father” for his caring assistance, and asked him why he worked so hard to help people like him flee. The monsignor answered that they needed reserves they could rely on in the future.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Goni, *The Real Odessa*, 246.

The Ustasha in Argentina

CROATS AND USTASHA IN BUENOS AIRES

Early Croatian immigrants arrived in Buenos Aires in the mid 1800s seeking employment. In time, they gave rise to a sizeable colony, made up predominantly of Dalmatians settled in Buenos Aires's south, in the neighborhood of La Boca, as well as in those known as Dock Sud and Avellaneda, shared with the Italian community. Croats worked as sailors onboard merchant ships and ocean liners, or as longshoremen or laborers for companies along the coast; a minority lived in inland provinces, working in agriculture and construction. Some became successful entrepreneurs. Croatian communities had their own associations and clubs, such as the former Austro-Hungarian Mutual Aid Society, turned into the Yugoslav Mutual Aid Society in 1920. In 1931, during a trip to Argentina, Branko Jelić created the Hrvatski Domo-bran (Croatian Soldier), an association committed to spreading Ustashism among Croatian emigrants. Around the same time Father Blaž Stefanić landed in Buenos Aires as well, and founded the Croatian House in Avenida Salta. Croatian and Bosnian-Herzegovinian Franciscans were active in several communities. The sisters of Charity and the sisters of Mercy arrived from Zagreb and ran a school in Dock Sud and a retirement home in Cortines, some 70 kilometers from Buenos Aires. Before the outbreak of World War II, the Croatian community in Argentina counted between 130,000 and 150,000 members.¹

1 Čizmić, Sopta, and Šakić, *Iseljena Hrvatska*, 163 and 173.

In the first few months of 1946, a group of religious arrived in Buenos Aires to prepare the ground for the new contingents. Petar Čiklič and his brother Ljubo, Friar Vlado Bilobrk, and Friar Mate Luketa were among the most active such religious. Cardinal Santiago Copello, the primate of the Argentine Church, made the diocesan Caritas available to the Ustasha and personally endeavored to support them.² He had a special bond with the Croats, for he'd been made cardinal priest to the Roman church of Saint Jerome of the Illyrians during the 1935 consistory. With backing from Draganović and the Pontifical Croatian College of St. Jerome in Rome, this welcoming network made it possible for the fugitives who arrived in subsequent years to settle into an environment characterized by strong group solidarity.

In addition to the support of fellow nationals, the Ustasha could count on backing from Perón's regime, which favored their settlement, as it did with Fascists and Nazis. In this context, qualified exponents from the defunct Third Reich created several organizations in Buenos Aires to sustain their comrades in arms both in Latin America and back in Germany. Actual fund-raising campaigns were carried out on the *Freie Presse*, a German-language daily newspaper. The funds were destined in part to those who were taking their "first steps in the new land," and in part to provide aid to those who had been unable to leave Germany or were still interned in Europe's camps. Thousands of packages were sent from Buenos Aires through the Cooperative for American Remittances to Europe (CARE). In Argentina, the latter enjoyed state patronage. Therefore, each package contained a photograph of Perón and Evita. Thousands of additional *donativos* raised by the German-Argentine Aid Committee were sent by Eine Reise ohne Sorgen (A Trip without Worries, EROS) to German or Swiss religious institutions. These then delivered them directly to those in need preventing their being seized by the Allied authorities. Indeed, most packages "were intended for one-

² Founded by Monsignor Baldelli as a relief organization, Caritas was present in all dioceses around the world, and depended on the Pontifical Commission for Assistance.

time national socialists and their families, whom the winning powers had subjected to sanctions.”³ The association most active in its endeavors was Kameradenwerk (Work for Comrades), which helped the families of former Third Reich officials, sometimes even paying for “the legal defense fees of former Nazis under trial in Europe.” Founded and directed by Colonel Hans Ulrich Rudel, a much-decorated Luftwaffe officer and a close friend of Perón’s, the Kameradenwerk also engaged in significant political work and propaganda promoting the rebirth of Nazism both in the New World and in Europe.⁴

The first substantial influx of Croatian exiles and criminals took place on 25 January 1947 when the ship *Andrea Gritti* reached Argentina, and then on 1 April with the arrival of the *Philippa*. Rather than joining the prewar Croatian community, most of the new arrivals settled in Buenos Aires’s northern and northwestern neighborhoods. Much like the Nazis and Fascists, the Ustasha regarded themselves as political refugees, and their permanence in the New World as temporary, pending their return to the motherland. Estimations about the number of Croats who arrived in Argentina in the wake of World War II are not all the same. In 1949, the Yugoslav government estimated that between 10,000 and 12,000 members of its opposition had arrived in Argentina by that year, including 600 war criminals. Yet these figures included Chetniks and Slovenian collaborationists, as well as Ustasha.⁵ Some scholars maintain the number of Croats ranged between 5,000 and 10,000. Others place the number at 20,000.⁶ As had already hap-

3 Meding, *La ruta de los nazis en tiempo de Perón*, 237 and 240.

4 Goni, *The Real Odessa*, 134. Rudel was assisted by Kurt Christmann, former commander of the notorious *Einsatzgruppen*, and by the SS criminal Ludwig Lienhardt. The Duce’s son, Vittorio Mussolini, the former head of the Fascist Party, Carlo Sforza, and Ante Pavelić took part in the association’s secret meetings.

5 MSPS, Fond PA, f. 59, d. 6, sign. b. 414469, 10 August 1949.

6 Nikola Glamuzina is among those who estimate that between 5,000 and 10,000 Croats arrived in Argentina after the war (Glamuzina, *Geografija Argentine*, 45–46). Marko Sinovčić, a Croatian emigrant, claims that no more than 5,000 Croats arrived after 1945 (Sinovčić, *Hrvati u Argentini i njihov doprinos Hrvatskoj kulturi*, 23). Vladimir Stanković, on the other hand, claims the figure was closer to 20,000 (Stanković, *Katolička Crkva i Hrvati izvan domovine*, 126).

pened in Italy, in Argentina the groups also came together based on nationality and political affiliation. In addition to the Ustasha, there were the members of the Peasant Party, the members of “Free Slovenia,” and the Serbian group coalesced around the journal called *Protest*.

Many exiles soon found a job in construction, thanks to the influence Branko Benzon—Mr. and Mrs. Perón’s friend and personal physician—wielded on Minister of Public Works Pistarini. Buenos Aires was going through a period of great expansion. Besides the new airport, Ciudad Evita (Evita City) was one of the great plans promoted by the regime. The huge construction site opened in 1947 at La Matanza, in the capital’s suburbs. It was expected to welcome about 15,000 people, recently settled in the city from the countryside, or immigrants. The estate was designed much like a garden city, with efficient educational, health, cultural, and recreational facilities. Former Ustasha henchmen entered the state apparatus. For example, Josip Balen, the one-time minister of forestry of the Independent State of Croatia, was appointed as director of the federal reforestation office. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs hired Franjo Nevistić, whereas Ante Vrkljan, a high officer of Pavelić’s army, became the commander of an Argentine navy unit. The Yugoslav government wanted the three men on charges of war crimes.⁷

Like the Ustasha, Nazis also found good jobs thanks to Perón’s protection and to endorsements from magnates of the German-Argentine community, such as the billionaire Ludwig Freude and the industrialist Ricardo Staudt, both of whom were Perón’s close friends. Other entrepreneurs, such as the oil magnate Roberto Mertig and the businessman Friedrich W. Schlottmann, owner of the Sedalana textile company, offered technical and administrative positions. The company that signed the most contracts was the *Compañía Argentina para Proyectos y Realizaciones Industriales* (CAPRI), born under the state-owned *Agua y Energía Eléctrica* and run by the former SS captain Carlos Horst Fuldner. Headquartered in the province of Tucumán, in the northern part

7 MSPS, Fond PA, 1949, f. 59, d. 6, sign. b. 414469.

of the country, the company developed river-based irrigation projects and electricity production. At first, CAPRI hired local workers and German engineers, but in time its contracts came to serve the purpose of offering a number of criminals a cover and a stipend. This was the case, for instance, of Eichmann and Pavelić.⁸

PAVELIĆ IN ARGENTINA

The *poglavnik* disembarked in Buenos Aires on 6 November 1948. It appears that during his trip to Argentina he contracted scabies. It is certain he spent two months in the Hospital Aleman, in the city center. His arrival did not go unnoticed. On 20 January 1949, a Yugoslav embassy official secretly took a photograph of him strolling around Buenos Aires. In those same days, Pavelić stated he would no longer be involved in Croatian politics. A month later, however, he resumed his activity delivering speeches and writing articles in *Hrvatska*, the new paper published by Ustasha emigrants, founded and edited by former top officials, including Vjekoslav Vrančić, Franjo Nevistić, and Vinko Nikolić. It was on this paper Pavelić announced the establishment of the Hrvatska Državotvorna Stranka, a party for the creation of the Croatian State “against the Yugoslav chaos, for Croatia’s freedom and independence,” on 15 October 1949. According to the *poglavnik*, this new political subject would seize power and carry out profound economic and social reforms, thereby molding the new, independent Croatia. The party’s program did display some novelties, particularly in regard to the country’s constitutional makeup. Pavelić now envisioned the new state as a parliamentary republic founded on free elections.⁹

Pavelić believed Yugoslavia’s hours were numbered. Sure enough, the situation was delicate in the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia. Following its expulsion from the Soviet bloc and the resulting

8 Meding, *La ruta de los nazis en tiempo de Perón*, 233 and 295. Fuldner and his partner Siebrecht recruited so many Nazis they were known by the nickname of “Capri’s fishermen.”

9 Krizman, *Pavelić u bjekstvu*, 231–34.

break in its commercial relations with communist countries, trade had plummeted, and the fallout for the local economy had been tremendous. The five-year plan launched in 1947 had been compromised beyond repair. Still, Tito's regime endured. By the end of 1949, Minister of Foreign Affairs Edvard Kardelj claimed Yugoslavia had established itself as an alternative "to Soviet state capitalism and to its bureaucratic deformation."¹⁰ Meanwhile, with an eye to increasing conflict within the socialist family, the United States offered growing support to Yugoslavia's new course.

Thus, the uncertain development of the situation in Yugoslavia compelled Pavelić to establish a Croatian government in exile, and to assume its presidency. Džafer Kulenović and Vjekoslav Vrančić were appointed vice presidents. Petar Pejačević and Ivica Frković took office as the foreign affairs and agriculture ministers, respectively. Rafael Boban was placed at the head of the armed forces. Other posts went to Stjepan Hefer, Jozo Turina, and Himlija Bešlagić.¹¹ Pavelić announced the birth of the government in exile by means of a radio message broadcast from Montevideo on 10 April 1951. The date, marking the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Independent State of Croatia, was not accidental. Nor was the place from which the announcement was made. At the time, the Yugoslav government was insistently asking for Pavelić's extradition from Argentina. Perhaps in an attempt to take some pressure off the Argentine government, or maybe just to cloud matters, Pavelić wanted to lend credence to the theory that he'd moved to Uruguay. Caution and discretion lasted only for as long as was needed to relieve tensions. Then, on 18 January 1952, the Ustasha community resumed its public demonstrations. At a large meeting in Villa Martelli, in the province of Buenos Aires, those in attendance responded to a speech by Pavelić with a round of applause. Two months later, a delegation of the Croatian government in exile led by Pavelić himself

¹⁰ Petranović, Končar, and Radonjić, *Sednice centralnog komiteta KPJ (1948–1952)*, 474.

¹¹ Krizman, *Pavelić u bjekstvu*, 246.

paid a visit to the public works minister, who reaffirmed his support for the community.¹² Meanwhile, the Argentine foreign affairs minister continued to ignore the Yugoslav government's repeated requests for Pavelić's extradition.

Pavelić was also impatient to return to his motherland, albeit as the state's leader. In January 1954, he wrote in *Hrvatska*: "The Croatian people know their children are preparing, and will be ready to rescue them at the crucial time. The Croatian armed forces exist, and are waiting for orders. Our duty is to be alert, keep watch on the events, and be ready to step in at the outbreak of a new world war."¹³ Despite his proclamations, however, facts constantly disappointed his hopes for an imminent military clash between the East and the West.

Forced to endure an exile that was turning out to be longer than expected, Pavelić prepared to take a new political step in the course of 1954. For a few years now, Milan Stojadinović—the Serbian politician who had led the Yugoslav government between 1935 and 1939, bringing it closer to Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany—had also found a safe haven in Argentina. A courteous relationship developed between Stojadinović and Pavelić. Meeting often and spending quite a bit of time together, the two men also came to hold similar political views. In July 1954, Stojadinović published an article in *Zastava* (Flag) titled "The Search for Serbo-Croatian Peace." Soon after, Pavelić answered publishing an article in *Hrvatska* titled "For Good Relations between Neighbors." In a subsequent interview to the periodical *El mundo Argentino*, Stojadinović said:

Doctor Pavelić and I hold the same view. We are both nationalists and regard international communism as the enemy of our peoples. So far, much blood has been spilled and many have died in the struggle between our two peoples. From this moment on, there will

¹² MSPS, Fond PA, 1953, f. 47, d. 10, sign. b, 42859.

¹³ *Hrvatska*, 27 January 1954; Camarasa, *Organizzazione Odessa*, 78.

be no more victims [resulting from] a clash between us, for we must join forces against our common foes.¹⁴

The essence of their proposition, which led to an alliance of sorts, could be summed up in the slogan “Independent Serbia and Independent Croatia.” These were but political hypotheses shared by leaders in exile, and crucial matters remained unaddressed, including where the borders between the two future states would be. Still, the perspective was unprecedented, and reconciled the aspirations of two nationalist movements, the Serbian and the Croatian, whose trajectories had until now been conflicting. The entente was short-lived, however. Clashes in the Ustasha movement determined its end.

CRISIS AND THE BREAKUP OF THE USTASHA MOVEMENT

Rifts within the Ustasha community emerged early on. In some cases they amounted to score settling or personal resentments among party leaders. Other times, they stemmed from matters of a more political nature, as in the case of the accusations leveled against Pavelić for making wrong or arbitrary decisions. As early as 1949, Stjepo Perić, the former ambassador of the Independent State of Croatia to Rome and Sofia, charged that Pavelić had promised Italy the right to seize Dalmatia long before returning to Zagreb and signing the Pacts of Rome. Eugen-Dido Kvaternik set forward the same thesis three years later. He further contended that Pavelić had made a number of political mistakes at the time of the first emigration to Italy—when the lack of solid ties with the motherland had prevented the Ustasha movement from becoming firmly rooted in Croatia—and was out of touch with the country’s reality. At first sight these could appear to be skirmishes and attempted paybacks between party leaders defeated by history. Kvaternik escalated the disagreement, until finally all the movement’s contra-

¹⁴ Krizman, *Pavelić u bjelovinu*, 261 and 286.

dictions surfaced. In a 1955 article Kvaternik wrote: "Doctor Pavelić is now politically dead. His endeavors are typical of an ancien régime politician."¹⁵ Kvaternik voiced his opinions in the columns of *Hrvatska Revija*, the journal Vinko Nikolić founded in Buenos Aires in 1951, in the wake of his falling-out with Pavelić and after leaving *Hrvatska*.

Ivo Bogdan, the embodiment of the Ustasha movement's intellectual spirit, belonged to a group that had distanced itself from Pavelić ever since arriving in Argentina. Bogdan founded a monthly political and literary magazine with the title *Sloboda* (Liberty) and accused Pavelić of having forced "the Croatian people to fight in the interest of fascism during the war." In Argentina, Bogdan further maintained, Pavelić persisted with antidemocratic and anti-Semitic propaganda, and glorified Jasenovac's system through his endorsement of Luburić. By so doing he fueled Serbian accusations against Croatian emigrants, for he cast Croats as collaborationists and Nazi fascists. Bogdan was persuaded that Pavelić lacked the stature of a head of state, "having always been, and continuing to be, in essence, a conspirator and a terrorist."¹⁶

Soon, criticisms against Pavelić shifted from the historical-political plane to the practical plane of his management of economic resources. Accusations were made to the effect that Pavelić had taken possession of the "Croatian" gold, and used it for private ends. Kvaternik revealed that the then head of state had paid monthly bribes to some of his ministers—including Artuković, Dumandžić, and Tortić—while in Zagreb, believing he would never face opposition as a result.¹⁷ Other leading members of the Ustasha organization chose not to set out on a path of personal conflict with the *poglavnik*, but still engaged in independent action. This was the case of Ivan Oršanić, for example.¹⁸ Af-

¹⁵ Ibid., 317; quoted in Kvaternik, *Riječi i činjenice*, *Hrvatska Revija* 5, March 1955, 71.

¹⁶ Krizman, *Pavelić u bjekstvu*, 322–23.

¹⁷ Ibid., 330.

¹⁸ In the 1930s, Oršanić was a collaborator of Archbishop Stepinac, and an editor for the nationalist magazine *Hrvatska smotra* (Croatian review). Then, in 1939, the Yugoslav authorities arrested him. Pavelić later appointed him minister of propaganda in 1941. He held that office for two months only before the Germans requested his removal. From that time on, he was involved in the Ustasha Youth.

ter the fall of the Ustasha regime, he had taken shelter and helped the fugitives in Italy. Later, upon arriving in Argentina, he had launched a paper, the *Republika Hrvastka*. In 1951, Oršanić even founded the Hrvatska Republikanska Stranka (Croatian Republican Party). Although it never garnered much of a following among Croatian emigrants, the party did attest to its founder's determination to maintain his political independence.

In those same years, the Casa Europea Argentina (European-Argentine House) was especially active in Buenos Aires, taking in all of the former fighters of the Axis. Its board included Croatian, Hungarian, Ukrainian, Russian, French, Scandinavian, Spanish, Italian, and German representatives, united in their purpose to free Europe from the "slavery of the East and the West."¹⁹ The ideology holding all these exiles together filled the columns of the monthly paper *Der Weg* (The way), the main mouthpiece of resurgent Nazism.²⁰ In order to rehabilitate the SS, *Der Weg* denied the extermination of Jews, condemned the methods used at Nuremberg, and cast in a different light the objectives pursued by the SS in its capacity as a revolutionary elite.²¹ *Der Weg* envisioned a "New Europe," that is, a large corporate state resulting from the federation of the new Reich and Europe's other sovereign peoples, which would build a new order based on such concepts as family, tribe, and nation.

It is unclear why Pavelić and most other Ustasha entered this political-cultural milieu, a hotbed of the so-called Black International, precisely as they were abandoning the ideology of corporate fascism and

¹⁹ Meding, *La ruta de los nazis en tiempo de Perón*, 246.

²⁰ Established in 1947, *Der Weg* was the beloved brainchild of Editorial Duerer, the publishing house founded by the bookseller Theodor Schmidt and by Eberhard Fritsch, the former head of Buenos Aires's Hitler Youth. The paper was printed in 2,000 copies at first. The number rose to 10,000 in 1948–49, and climbed to 25,000 in 1953. The paper circulated predominantly in Germany.

²¹ According to *Der Weg*, the Cold War was a "fictitious conflict" orchestrated by the strong powers of the East and West, that is, by Jewish internationalism, which aimed at a world unitary state. Thus, it was necessary to destroy "the tentacles of the international conspiracy" plotted "by the octopus with a Star of David as its head." See *Der Weg* 11/12 (1956–X), quoted in Meding, *La ruta de los nazis en tiempo de Perón*, 347–48.

adhering to the principles of democracy. Institutionally and constitutionally, the independent Croatia envisaged by Pavelić could rightfully be included among Western-type democracies. Perhaps the stance assumed by Pavelić and Ustashism, with its exclusive focus on nationalism, was a mere tactic to attract all Croats who did not recognize themselves in Tito's regime into the movement, including the more moderate ones.

In any case, the Ustasha who had remained in Europe were following the same course. In 1950, in Munich, Branko (Branimir) Jelić and his brother Ivan, along with Mate Frković, Ernest Bauer, Stjepan Buć, and Krunoslav Draganović, founded the Hrvatski Narodni Odbor (Croatian National Committee, HNO).²² The committee's political program was to fight against the communist tyranny in Yugoslavia and once again give birth to an independent Croatia. The new state was to include Bosnia-Herzegovina (granted broad administrative autonomy), was to be founded on parliamentary democracy, and would banish any kind of discrimination based on race, religion, or nationality. Jelić's committee, which succeeded in energizing much of the Croatian community in Germany, did not refrain from harsh criticism of Pavelić for his methods while in power, and advocated his retiring from active politics in Croatia's national interest.

Vjekoslav Maks Luburić, in charge of death camps in the Independent State of Croatia and subsequently commander-in-chief of the Croatian army, was another one-time Ustasha leader to turn his back on Pavelić. After arriving in Spain under the false name of Maximilian Soldo, Luburić settled near Valencia and completed his training at the military academy. In 1955, following several squabbles with Pavelić, Luburić left the Ustasha movement and founded the Drustvo Prijatelja Drine (Friends of the Drina Society), and soon after that the Hrvatski Narodni Otpor (Croatian National Resistance), which took root in

²² Up until 1941, Branko Jelić held important posts within the Ustasha movement. Then he was arrested in London, and spent the entire war in jail on the Isle of Man, thus unable to take part in the atrocities committed by the Ustasha back in their homeland.

many countries thanks to his prestige. Upon moving to Cartagena, in southern Spain, Luburić opened a press. Through it, he printed the *Drina*, a newspaper, and books signed with the pseudonyms General Drinjanin and Colonel Dizdar.²³

By the mid-1950s, the Ustasha landscape had splintered into diverse and often conflicting fragments. The Ustasha could hardly be viewed as operating of one accord with regard to either their leadership or their objectives. In June 1956, in an attempt to regain the support of some of these factions and give unity to a movement spread across several continents, Pavelić founded the Hrvatski Oslobodilački Pokret (Croatian Liberation Movement, HOP). Alongside the *poglavnik* were Džafer Klenović, Vjekoslav Vrančić, Ivica Frković, Stjepan Hefer, and some politicians hailing from the Peasant Party's right, like Kordić, Šarinić and Matijević. In Pavelić's mind, this new organization adopted the legacy of the Ustasha movement and was in keeping with Ante Starčević's thought. The attempt bore little fruit, however, despite Pavelić's continuing to control a number of cells, and even though these actively carried out propaganda and printed papers like the biweekly *Hrvatska* in Buenos Aires, the weekly *Spremnost* (Readiness) in Australia, the newspaper *Nezavisna Država Hrvatske* (Independent State of Croatia) in Canada, and *Hrvatska Sloboda* (Croatian liberty) in Germany.

Between 1956 and 1957, even Vjekoslav Vrančić distanced himself from Pavelić, followed shortly thereafter by Jozo Dumandžić. Both had been among his closest and most trusted collaborators.²⁴ One after the other, the *odredbe* (orders) signed by Pavelić and circulated in the newly established HOP movement gave notice of men stepping in to replace others who had turned their backs on the *poglavnik*. The replacements

23 *Tko je Tko u NDH*, 241–242. Luburić was killed in 1967 by a UDBA agent who had infiltrated his organization.

24 In January 1957, after the break between Pavelić and Luburić had already taken place, a general assembly of Ustasha refugees was organized in Buenos Aires under the leadership of Franjo Mišinski, which unanimously ruled in favor of founding a new party, the Hrvatski Demokratski Odbor (Croatian Democratic Committee).

were second-rate figures, or novices representative of a generation that was only then joining the movement.

PERÓN'S FALL AND THE ATTEMPT ON PAVELIĆ'S LIFE

Perón had been triumphantly reelected president in September 1951. The industrial plan imposed on Argentina to turn it into a modern power was failing, however. The massive military expenditures and the increase in salaries without a corresponding increase in productivity had brought on inflation, and a significant devaluation of the local currency. Perón tried to adjust his aim with the second five-year plan, launched in 1952. To revitalize farming and promote the birth of a class of "small rural landowners," he set forth the idea of expropriating "large unproductive estates."²⁵ Yet an unfavorable international conjuncture thwarted exports, and inflation skyrocketed, while wastefulness and misappropriation increased public debt. The dictatorship worsened when freedom of the press and freedom of association were suppressed, causing widespread dissatisfaction. Finally, during the elections held on 25 April 1954, the radicals in the opposition secured over two million votes. Even the military and the Catholic Church were growing weary of "the widespread corruption and the personality cult Perón promoted."²⁶ In a sudden about-face in the second half of 1954, Perón set out on an openly anticlerical political course. The regime press started exposing the clerical infiltration of the country's institutions. On 10 November, during a government assembly, Perón "accused the clergy and the Argentine Catholic Action of antinational activities, and of complicity with the big landowners and financial oligarchs." He further said his being a devout Catholic would not stop him from "cleansing the Church of its bad shepherds," and even read a list "that included three bishops."²⁷

²⁵ Vita-Finzi, *Perón mito e realtà*, 92–93.

²⁶ Goni, *The Real Odessa*, 188.

²⁷ Vita-Finzi, *Perón mito e realtà*, 100.

Attempting to identify the causes of the clash between state and Church in Argentina, in January 1955 the authoritative *La Civiltà Cattolica* wrote:

President Perón [...] surely cannot ignore the Marxist tendencies that affect the General Confederation of Labor at his side, and no doubt play a large part, together with other forces, in inspiring the tone and substance of his campaign against the Church. After all, is this not the stock of phrases we have become accustomed to in browsing through the modern communist press, or the older Masonic and anticlerical press? Unwittingly, the ground is being prepared for the growth of communism. [...] No graver tactical error could be committed.²⁸

Within a few months, the situation deteriorated in Argentina. On 11 June 1955, during the Corpus Domini celebrations (a holiday removed from the Argentine calendar the month before), the government decided that for reasons of public order “the traditional procession was to take place inside the temple.” A crowd of over 100,000 Catholics gathered outside the church and gave rise to an immense protest march, which paralyzed the city center. The demonstration ended in front of the parliament building, where the words “Cristo Re” were written on the facade. Then someone set the Argentine flag on fire. The interior minister had Monsignor Tato, the auxiliary bishop of Buenos Aires, and Father Novoa, the cathedral canon, arrested. The two men were removed from their post by government decree and deported from the

28 *La Civiltà Cattolica* I (1955): 151, Caprile S.I., *La svolta*. The break with Perón occurred in 1955, but the Church had long detected the signs of a progressive weakening of its Argentine bulwark, which it attributed to the increase in the socialist unionization of the masses. Between December 1951 and March 1952, Father Felix Morlion visited Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, and Peru. The Flemish Dominican, who had collaborated with the US secret services during the war, founded the Pro-Deo University in Rome, whose Catholic student body spanned twenty-six countries. In South America, Morlion intended to set up centers of social and political education linked with the university, in order to form a new leading class capable of keeping the communist influence at bay.

country. The Vatican's answer arrived on 16 June, in a message that mentioned no names, but was clearly directed at Juan Perón. The Holy See excommunicated "all those who had trampled on the rights of the Church, and resorted to violence against ecclesiastical authorities."²⁹

That day, the Argentine navy attempted its coup. A flight of airplanes took off from a naval base and bombed Plaza de Mayo. Perón took shelter in an underground bunker of the Ministry of War, while the army launched an attack on the Ministry of the Navy, where rebels were known to be, forcing them to surrender. After a day of fighting, there were 335 dead and 600 injured, most of them civilians. The final blow was dealt against the Argentine president three months later, when the navy joined forces with several units of the army, which had rebelled in various parts of the country. Perón was forced to resign, surrendering all power to a military junta. On 21 September 1955, the latter formed a temporary government presided over by Eduardo Lonardi, a retired general who had led the revolt in the region of Córdoba. The new government reconciled with the Church, restored democratic liberties, and started prosecuting the people guilty of looting the state treasury, as well as the supporters of Perón's dictatorship.³⁰

Some of the Ustasha most compromised by association with the old regime fled Argentina: Branko Benzon left with Perón; Milo Bogetić, one of Perón's bodyguards, and Vlado Svescen, at the head of Pavelić's personal guard, took refuge in the Dominican Republic, where Rafael Trujillo hired them as instructors in his political police. The police searched Pavelić's house, and Pavelić himself was taken into custody and questioned. The new government and the press charged the Ustasha with having been Perón's henchmen and even with having carried

29 Vita-Finzi, *Perón mito e realtà*, 102. The author correctly points out that Hitler himself was never on the receiving end of so harsh a sanction.

30 Perón left Argentina on 2 October 1955, taking refuge in Paraguay. He later moved to Panama, to Caracas, and finally to Madrid. Eighteen years later, when the Justicialist Party led by the Peronist Campora won the elections, doors were opened for him to return to Argentina. In September 1973, Perón was reelected president. Upon his death, a year later, his widow Isabel Martínez stepped in as president.

out “covert operations” to repay the Argentine leader for his generous hospitality. The president of the Croatian House, Ivan Asančaić, and Vjekoslav Vrančić paid to have a statement published in the Buenos Aires-based newspaper *La Razón* on 23 November 1955: “We categorically deny that any Croat, much less a group of Croats, has ever been in the employ of the deposed government or otherwise destined to interfere in domestic or outside affairs of the Argentine Republic, with or without weapons.”³¹ In an interview released to a journalist in Buenos Aires, Pavelić himself said: “The Croats who arrived in Argentina have had no contact with Perón, and none of them has ever received help from the government. The only support Croats have been able to count on to arrive in Argentina has come from Croatian communities already present in Chile and Argentina, papal circles in Rome, the Red Cross, and the IRO.”³²

Pavelić had always strolled around Buenos Aires undisturbed, but after his house was searched and following his provisional detention he started taking a bodyguard along with him. There was an outcry in the media against the presence in Argentina of Pavelić, the Ustaša, and many Nazi war criminals, cast as emblems of the distortions of the Peronist era. Early in April 1957, the newspaper *El Plata* published an article titled “Servers of Fascism Turned Instructors of the Alliance [Perón’s militia]: Pavelić, Vrančić, Asančaić, and Other Croatian Nazis Served under the Peronist Regime, to Which They Contributed with Their Horrendous Experience.”³³ On the evening of 10 April, the *poglavnik* was returning home, followed at close range by two bodyguards dressed in sports clothing. A gun-wielding man unknown to them came out of nowhere at a street corner, fired six shots, and fled as a bleeding Pavelić fell to the ground. Soon a Croatian doctor arrived to the scene, gave medical aid to Pavelić, and accompanied him to the hospital. Two bullets had struck the *poglavnik*. While his

31 Camarasa, *Organizzazione Odessa*, 94–95.

32 In *Hrvatska*, no. 23–24, 21 December 1955, 191–92.

33 Camarasa, *Organizzazione Odessa*, 77.

condition was not desperate, one of the two bullets was lodged in his spine, and the injury might have damaged his motor system.

For a long time, the identity of the attempted murderer was shrouded in mystery. Only recently has Blagoje Jovović, an elderly Montenegrin who emigrated to Argentina in 1947, convincingly claimed responsibility for the attempted hit.³⁴ Jovović had decided to kill Pavelić since 1950, upon finding out that he lived in Buenos Aires. He had unsuccessfully asked some of his friends in Chetnik emigrant circles for help. Finally, he'd been able to find an accomplice—almost certainly a UDBA agent—with whom he'd prepared his plan. He tailed Pavelić for months, ultimately striking on the anniversary of the founding of the Independent State of Croatia. Following the attempt on Pavelić's life, the Yugoslav consul in Buenos Aires told Jovović that the Yugoslav minister of the interior Ranković would let him return to his homeland, and provide him with a comfortable life. Jovović declined this offer, however, and only returned to Montenegro for a brief visit in 1998. On that occasion, he went to the Orthodox monastery of Ostrog, where he recounted his story to Archbishop Amfilohije, who listened carefully to all that he had to say, and finally recommended he get in touch with a reporter.³⁵

PAVELIĆ'S DEATH

In Croatian circles, the attempt on the *poglavnik's* life had engendered rage and thirst for revenge. These feelings soon found their outlet in the murder of an Orthodox priest. Pavelić's wounding created further clamor regarding his presence in Argentina. Newspapers published his life story, complemented by a brief description of the Ustasha movement. They even put out pictures of him and divulged his home address. In an interview to the newspaper *Democracia*, a Yugoslav embassy

34 Krušelj, "Četnički atentator s Rankovićevom zahvalnicom."

35 Jovović repeated his account before the journalist Burzanović. A long interview and a book followed: Burzanovic, *Two Bullets for Pavelic*.

official reiterated the well-worn plea for his extradition: “We absolutely want Pavelić so that he may stand trial in Yugoslavia for the crimes he has committed.” Not wanting to yield to such pressure, the Argentine government stalled for time and called on its own ambassador in Belgrade to request a new list of the charges against the *poglavnik*. Meanwhile, Pavelić had vanished. Josip Marković, one-time functionary of the Independent State of Croatia, later gave this account: “on 18 April, with his wounds still open, Pavelić fled Lomas del Palomar along with his personal physician and two collaborators, heading for an unknown location—a friend’s house, no doubt.”³⁶ He stayed there for forty-nine days, assisted by his doctor at all times. Pavelić suffered from diabetes, which complicated the healing process. When his health allowed, he moved to Rio Gallegos, in Argentine Patagonia, and later to Punta Arenas, in southern Chile, before settling in Santiago for a while. Pavelić remained in the Chilean capital for four months, the guest of a fellow Croatian “patriot.” He failed to recover, however, and finally decided to move to Spain, where he expected to find better health care and a safe haven. The organization of his trip rested on the effort of many. On 27 November 1957, upon receiving permission to do so, Pavelić set out for the Spanish capital. On his arrival, Archbishop Ivan Šarić was there to greet him.

In Madrid he lived with his family in an apartment near the Buen Retiro, where he would take daily strolls with his daughter Višnja or with Branko Marić, a Franciscan friar who was becoming his confidant. Despite his failing health, Pavelić kept in touch with the Ustaša community still loyal to him up until mid-1959. Friar Marić carried out much of the work:

At the time, we’d started organizing the HOP [Hrvatski Oslobođilački Pokret]. We were in touch with its cells, as well as with col-

36 Krizman, *Pavelić u bjekstvu*, 398–99 and 420. Pavelić’s house was on Calle Aviador Mer-moz 643, in Lomas del Palomar, a town on the outskirts of Buenos Aires.

laborators and friends. Several visitors from countries on the other side of the Atlantic arrived to meet with us. We would consult with them, and make new plans. [...] The organization gained momentum in Australia, and this new spirit spread to Canada and to all of Europe. Refugees old and new from the camps in Italy and Austria joined the HOP.³⁷

In the summer of 1959, a French newspaper alleged that Pavelić was the guest of the San Francisco el Grande monastery in Madrid. “The 25th anniversary of [the regicide in] Marseilles was drawing near,” Friar Marić recounted, “and much of the French radio and press launched a hate-filled campaign against Pavelić, his family, and his collaborators.”³⁸ French correspondents were making their way to the Spanish capital, where, upon finding Friar Marić, they would request a meeting with the *poglavnik* and permission to photograph him. Marić invariably answered that Pavelić had left Spain. Still, the French reporters continued to wander about the monastery in hopes of catching sight of the *poglavnik* during one of his supposed outings. In fact, Pavelić lived in a different part of the city altogether, and, regardless, was no longer in any condition to leave his dwelling.

At the end of October, his health took a turn for the worse. His physician suggested he undergo surgery, and Pavelić was transferred to the German hospital where Marshal Goering’s former doctor was a surgeon. The operation took place on 16 November, and seemed successful at first. A few days later, however, the patient’s conditions got worse. A paralysis affected his lower limbs and several complications developed, rendering the situation irreversible. In those days, no longer able to write, Pavelić dictated his political testament to Friar Marić. He entrusted the Ustasha with the task of continuing to fight for Croatia’s independence, and appointed Stjepan Hefer as his political heir and suc-

³⁷ Ibid., 429.

³⁸ Ibid., 431.

cessor at the head of the movement.³⁹ Ante Pavelić died on the night between 27 and 28 December 1959, assisted by his daughter Višnja and by Friar Branko Marić. As he lay there dying, he clutched the rosary he'd been gifted by Pius XII in 1941. Pope John XXIII's blessing arrived a few hours before his passing.

Reports and comments in the Western press covered Pavelić's death at length. With few exceptions, these accounts seemed to characterize any responsibility on his part in a number of serious crimes as having been more than compensated for by his merits. With the Cold War in full swing, the *poglavnik* and the Ustasha were also rehabilitated in the name of anticommunism.

THE ARTUKOVIĆ AFFAIR

Andrija Artuković's escape differed greatly from that of the other Ustasha leaders. After spending a few months in Austria, where his American pass afforded him a certain freedom, complications arose. The minister of the interior under the Independent State of Croatia during the years when the worst crimes had taken place, Artuković was second on the list compiled by the Yugoslav Committee, and as a result could not use his name. Monsignor Draganović supplied him with new documents, and indeed with a new identity, further making money available to him in a Swiss bank. Artuković was thus recast as Alois Anitch, a history teacher who had fled his country after suffering persecution at the hands of the communists. In November 1946, he crossed the Swiss border together with his wife and two young daughters. Friar Dominik Mandić, Monsignor Augustin Juretić, and Archbishop Šarić were there to await him. With their help, Artuković was granted hospitality in a Franciscan monastery in Fribourg, and a *permis de séjour* in the name of

39 A lawyer and a politician, Stjepan Hefer came from the ranks of the Croatian Peasant Party, whose active member he had been between 1924 and 1941. After the birth of the Independent State of Croatia, he held important government posts, including a ministry. After the war's end, he fled to Italy, and then to Argentina following Pavelić.

Alois Anitch. Seven months later, though, the federal police found out he was in fact the war criminal Artuković, and gave him two weeks' time to leave the territory of the Swiss Confederation. The Franciscans turned to the Irish consulate in Berne, filing for an entry visa in his name. In July 1947, Mr. Anitch and his family moved to Dublin.

Years later, the time the Anitch family spent in Ireland was the subject of a successful story, "The Artukovitch File," published by the author and journalist Hubert Butler in 1970, subsequently updated with new information.⁴⁰ Artuković lived at 6 Zion Road, in the neighborhood of Rathgar, in Dublin, where James Joyce had been born. The Anitch family spent a year in an elegant redbrick Victorian building, and enjoyed friendly relations with their neighbors. Interviewed by Butler, all those who had known Alois Anitch described him as an amiable retired history teacher, entirely devoted to his family. His two daughters, Zorica and Višnja, who now went by the names of Katerina and Aurea, studied in the House-Convent of the Sacred Heart, in the center of Dublin. The only person to visit the Anitch house regularly was a friar from Galway. Butler found out the latter was Lujo Ivandić, a Franciscan with a degree in dogmatic theology. Himself a fervent Ustasha, Friar Ivandić had fled to Rome in 1945. Two years later, in 1947, the general of the Franciscan order had sent him to the monastery of Galway to assist Artuković on his path to safety. Ivandić had told his brothers at the monastery in Galway that the communists had sentenced him to death. He spent his days reading press reviews issued by international newspapers. He listened to the radio in anticipation of the outbreak of World War III, which he believed would see the Americans invade Yugoslavia and put an end to Tito's despotic regime.

In July 1948, the Anitch family left Dublin and headed for the United States, settling in California, where Alois started working as an accountant in his brother's company. Yet all his backing and precau-

⁴⁰ Butler, *The Sub-Prefect Should Have Held His Tongue*, 283–303. Before the Second World War, Butler spent a long time in Zagreb, where he'd learned Serbo-Croatian.

tions were not enough. Two years later, the US Serbian community exposed Alois Anitch's true identity as Andrija Artuković, the "Butcher of the Balkans." In the course of 1951, Branko Miljus pleaded with the United Nations General Assembly, calling for the arrest of Artuković, Draganović, Pavelić, and Archbishop Šarić, who had committed the heinous crime of genocide and were currently living undisturbed in member states of the United Nations.

In 1952, the Yugoslav government asked the US Department of State to extradite Andrija Artuković for his crimes against humanity. The California Court ruled that extradition was impossible because of the lack of reciprocity treaties between the United States and Yugoslavia. When the Supreme Court challenged the ruling, the ensuing controversies dragged on for years. In time, the matter took on a political meaning. Artuković had joined the Knights of Columbus, a very powerful Catholic organization, and was now being invited to conferences, and to give lectures in institutions and universities. He was even being interviewed by newspapers and television. When for a short time he was placed under arrest, 50,000 fellow knights sent a petition to Congress, in which Artuković was described as a righteous man whose only crime had been to fight against communism. In Butler's words, "the murderers of the Old World had become the martyrs of the New."⁴¹

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Yugoslav government did not increase pressure to obtain Artuković. Maintaining good economic relations with the United States was more important than holding a trial in Zagreb, which would rekindle tensions between Yugoslav nations. The matter dragged on for three decades, until finally, after a consuming controversy between courts of law, Washington conceded the extradition. In 1986, Andrija Artuković, now eighty-six and affected by Alzheimer's, as well as other mental disorders, crossed the Atlantic Ocean to stand trial in Zagreb. He defended himself claiming his duties had been essentially administrative in nature, and professed innocence: "I

⁴¹ Ibid., 299.

The Ustasha in Argentina

have always acted according to my conscience and the teachings of the Catholic Church.”⁴² He was condemned to death, but the sentence was never carried out. Two years later, Artuković died in the infirmary of Zagreb’s military prison.

⁴² Butler, “The Artukovitch File.”

The Question of the Ustasha between Yugoslavia and the Vatican, 1952–72

THE NEW YUGOSLAV IDENTITY

At the end of 1952, the Sixth Congress of the Communist Party held in Zagreb sanctioned Yugoslavia's permanent rejection of the Soviet model. The party's name was changed to League of Communists of Yugoslavia. This was done to highlight that its fate was separated from that of the state. And, also, to reaffirm the party's federal character. Speaking from the party congress platform, Tito accused the Soviet Union of turning formerly independent countries like Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria into colonies. In a show of exceptional straightforwardness, Ranković also proved brave in acknowledging the excesses of the Yugoslav internal security apparatus in repressing pro-Soviet dissidents: most of the 17,000 Cominformists sentenced to "socially useful jobs" had been put into special prisons, or deported to the gulag of Goli Otok.¹

A new constitution and a series of reforms essential for the country's development were launched in 1953. Efforts were concentrated on heavy industry, energy production, and infrastructure. Between 1952 and 1961, the numbers of those in employment rose considerably. In the first four years, between 1952 and 1956, industrial production increased

1 Scotti, *Goli Otok*, 123. Goli Otok, a tiny island in the northern Adriatic, was turned into a prison and labor camp for thousands of party members with alleged Cominform sympathies, many of whom died of hardship.

by 60 percent, and Yugoslavia enjoyed the highest growth rate in the world, alongside Japan.² In agriculture, the new political mood and the disastrous outcomes of forced collectivization led to the rejection of the previous crusade against the “capitalist elements of the countryside,” and to the reorganization of agrarian property based on the coexistence of public and private. Favorable international conditions secured after the question of Trieste was settled, Yugoslavia’s admission with observer status to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and Hruščev’s ascent to power (and the changes he made to Soviet foreign policy), all contributed to Yugoslavia’s economic success in the 1950s. After six years of antagonism, Moscow and Belgrade reached a new understanding, and Yugoslavia went back to collaborating with all countries in the Soviet bloc. At the same time, Tito’s political realism and his ability to play on multiple fronts enabled him to keep cordial and beneficial relations with Great Britain and the United States, without letting this affect domestic politics. The decisions made during this period were the result of original thinking by Tito and his men. The “Yugoslav way” to socialism allowed the country to find new internal balance, and—through independence from the two blocs—to carve an international role for itself. Believing world peace could be maintained if the front of neutral countries was broadened, the Yugoslav leader endeavored in the creation of a stronghold made up of Third World countries, equidistant from the two major power blocs. This set the stage for the 1955 Conference of Bandung and the birth of the Non-Aligned Movement, a new player on the international scene.

YUGOSLAVIA AND THE VATICAN: FROM HOSTILITY TO DIALOGUE

Tito’s domestic and international successes were mirrored in reverse by his clash with the Holy See. Tensions started in the wake of the Second World War and continued until the death of Pius XII in 1958. The Vat-

² Bilandžić, *Hrvatska moderna povijest*, 387.

ican accused Tito of persecuting the Catholic clergy, as exemplified by the trial against Stepinac (who was now a sacrificial victim in the eyes of Rome), as well as of denying freedom of religion to Yugoslavia's millions of Catholics. When Tito allowed Monsignor Stepinac to be released on parole in December 1951, the Holy See took notice. But it also pointed out to the Yugoslav government that there were no grounds to claim that freedom of religion existed in the country, given that "the bishop of Mostar and 200 other priests and religious" were still being held in prison.³ The conflict only got worse when a book very critical of the Catholic Church was published in Zagreb in 1952. Titled *Secret Documents on the Relations between the Vatican and the Ustasha Independent State of Croatia*,⁴ the work leveled harsh accusations at the Croatian Catholic clergy, the holder of "a sad record of cruelty in the extermination of many defenseless innocents," as well as at the Holy See, guilty of having prompted Croatian bishops to harness "the clergy and Church in general to the Ustasha wagon." Yet the main cause of friction between Yugoslavia and the Vatican was the setting up of priestly associations. Born under the auspices of Tito's regime, they were professional organizations of the clergy, through which the government negotiated and ensured pensions, healthcare, and various kinds of subsidies. By these associations, the regime hoped to strengthen the "Yugoslav" character of the Croatian Catholic Church, and make it independent of the Holy See. Tito, who had voiced these hopes at the end of the war, reiterated them without fail at each meeting he had with members of the Catholic clergy: "We've broken free from Moscow. Why don't you break free from Rome?"⁵

The first Catholic association was founded in Istria in 1948 by Božo Milanović, and the greater part of the region's clergy enrolled in it. The Slovenian association Cyril and Methodius, whose ranks included over a hundred priests, was established in 1949. In January 1950, Dobri Pastir (Good Shepherd) was founded in Bosnia-Herzegovina. An asso-

3 *La Civiltà Cattolica* I (1952): 105, *Cronaca/Jugoslavia (not signed)*.

4 *Tajni Dokumenti o odnosima Vitikana i Ustaške "NDH"*.

5 *La Civiltà Cattolica* IV (1952): 429–30, Cavalli S.I., "Documenti segreti".

ciation of Croatian priests was set up in 1952, with Monsignor Rittig as its honorary president. All of these associations enjoyed a large following, with men of high moral standing joining their ranks and acting as guarantors of integrity and relative independence.⁶ Yugoslav Bishops and the Vatican alike opposed them, viewing them as a tool contrived by the regime to usurp the Church's ecclesiastical prerogatives. To prevent enrollment on the part of Catholic religious, Yugoslav bishops even issued a *Non Expedit* against them. The Holy See accused the government of Belgrade of interfering in ecclesiastical matters. Yugoslavia retorted the charge claiming the Vatican encroached on its domestic matters. Finally, on 17 December 1952, Stepinac's appointment as cardinal was received as a provocation, and Belgrade interrupted diplomatic relations with the Holy See.

Tito quickly realized the drastic break did not cast a favorable light on his country, however. Soon enough, Yugoslavia started showing signs of its willingness to resume relations. In 1953, when the federal government set to work to reform the country's constitution, a law was prepared on the legal status of religious communities. By imposing a separation between church and state, this law formally ensured freedom of conscience and religion. Before it was approved, the bill was submitted to ecclesiastical hierarchies, so that they might set forth their observations or any specific requests: the Orthodox Church shared some remarks, whereas the Catholic Church refused all collaboration.⁷

At that time, the Croatian Catholic Church was in serious difficulty. Six dioceses were vacant, because their bishop had died, fled, or been arrested. Almost everywhere the number of priests and religious had declined sharply.⁸ Exponents of the clergy were frequent targets for physical aggression, mostly resulting from the Church's face-off with

6 Alexander, *Church and the State in Yugoslavia Since 1945*, 124. Five hundred of the 1,030 priests present in the Republic of Slovenia in 1952 were members of these professional associations.

7 Ibid., 221.

8 Between 1945 and 1952, the number of priests and religious dropped from 1,364 to 971 in the archdiocese of Zagreb, from 940 to 455 in the diocese of Ljubljana, and from 313 to 204 in the diocese of Split; the number rose from 341 to 363 in the diocese of Sarajevo.

the regime regarding the question of priestly associations. The gravest incident involved Anton Vovk, Ljubljana's auxiliary bishop, who in 1952 was doused with gasoline and set on fire by a stranger. While Vovk sustained serious burns, he did not aggravate the event by drawing any more attention to it than necessary, and Minister of Foreign Affairs Kardelj, a fellow national, presented him with the government's official apologies. In a speech held in Ruma in the summer of 1953, Tito expressed complete disapproval of the attacks against the clergy and the Catholic Church: "The excesses that have taken place must not be allowed in a socialist country like our own, and we condemn them. [...] All of this is illegal, and we ask that the law be followed."⁹ He ended his speech by saying the best way to fight against religion was to educate younger generations. From that moment on, the aggression stopped. Thanks to a regime-granted amnesty, many detained religious further returned to their pastoral ministry.¹⁰

While Tito's regime endeavored to find a *modus vivendi* with the Catholic Church, the Vatican continued to spread the image of a martyred and persecuted Church, in Yugoslavia and throughout Eastern Europe. In a pastoral letter written in 1956, Pius XII exhorted Stepinac, as well as Archbishop Mindszenty and Archbishop Beran, to continue offering their testimony, and incited all Catholics in the three men's countries to resist communist power. Yet between 1953 and 1958 the shortcomings of Pius XII's politics became more obvious, until finally Pacelli's pontificate came to an end. Pius XII had been single-minded in his decision to oppose laicism and communism, making it impossible for the Church to reap the opportunities the other side was starting to offer. Elected pope at the end of 1958, John XXIII had the courage and foresight to overturn some of his predecessor's dogmas and promote a politics of peace between the East and the West.

9 HDA, RSUP-SRH-SDS, 001.15, Izjava o kleru, 9 and 136.

10 Relations between the Yugoslav government and the Orthodox Church also improved, owing to the progovernment stance assumed by Patriarch Vikentije, who, among other things, backed Yugoslav claims on Trieste (Ramet, *Nihil Obstat*, 17).

Krunoslav Draganović's removal from the Pontifical College of St. Jerome and Djuro Kokša's appointment as rector were among the early signs of the discontinuity between the new pontificate and the old as regarded relations with Yugoslavia.¹¹ The administration of charities was reorganized as well: the Vatican office devoted to helping Yugoslav immigrants in Italy was transferred from St. Jerome's to another location, and entrusted to a committee made up of new administrators. This new course was met with satisfaction in Belgrade, because it removed the reason for the government's ban on Yugoslav students in Roman colleges, where it was feared that they might be turned into Ustasha. As for the Vatican, it no longer hindered relations between religious of Croatian descent and the Yugoslav embassy to Italy, allowing them to settle their status, acquire their passports, and enjoy their civil rights.¹²

The Yugoslav ambassador to Italy, Mihailo Javorski, started showing a genuine desire to open a dialogue with the Vatican. For years now, a conflict had existed between Yugoslavia and the Holy See revolving around the matter of Stepinac, the restitution of the properties seized from the Church, and the possibility of teaching religion in schools, as well as circulating Catholic press in the country. Pius XII had seen solving all of these issues as preliminary to resuming normal diplomatic relations. But his intransigence had not been a boon to the interests of the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia. The new pontiff downsized the Vatican's requests, believing Yugoslavia would never yield on some matters—such as the restitution of the Church's assets—so as not to call into question one of the cornerstones of socialist politics.¹³

In 1959, during a visit by the pope, the archbishop of Belgrade, Josip Antun Ujčić, and the coadjutor bishop of Zagreb, Franjo Šeper, made a case for resuming relations with Belgrade. The two prelates suggested certain concessions be made to the Yugoslav government, so

11 An inquiry revealed that Draganović had demanded sizeable payments from fugitives that did not belong to the Ustasha movement.

12 MSPS, Fond PA, 1960, f. 109, d. 31, sign. b. 46281.

13 Ibid., sign. b. 41313, 1-2.

the latter would allow for students to go to Vatican colleges, and thus for a new clergy to be trained and settled in Yugoslav dioceses. According to Šeper and Ujčić, the activities of political emigrants, and particularly of some priests, were a major obstacle to resuming relations. Draganović could still count on a network of trusted men entrenched in pivotal positions within the Church structure, including Vatican Radio, whose editor, Ivan Tomas, in charge of broadcasts in Serbo-Croatian, often used that platform to make announcements inspired by the Ustasha ideology. In November, some ecclesiastics—including Smiljan Franjo Čekada, the bishop of Skopje—were arrested in Yugoslavia on charges of currency crimes and contraband. The ensuing investigation exposed Draganović as being implicated in the illegal trafficking.¹⁴ These charges might have been cause for embarrassment for the Vatican, particularly owing to a bishop's involvement. But Yugoslav authorities acted with discretion, and in its turn the Vatican did not exploit the arrests.

Toward the year's end, Archbishop Stepinac's health worsened.¹⁵ Yugoslav authorities made it known that, if openly asked by Stepinac, they would grant him to be transferred to any place of his liking, including to Rome. It would be hard to say whether the offer was disinterested or aimed at avoiding the creation of a martyr in the public eye. Either way, Stepinac—who always proudly refused to petition the regime for pardon—preferred to remain in the parish house of Krašić, where he passed away on 10 February 1960. The authorities arranged for a funeral in the same village, and for his burial in the local cemetery. Heeding Bishop Šeper's request, they later authorized the celebration of a solemn funeral in the cathedral of Zagreb, and allowed his remains to be transferred to the same church.¹⁶ By acknowledging St-

¹⁴ MSPS, Fond PA, 1960, f. 109, d. 31, sign. b. 41313, 3–5, and sign. b. 46281.

¹⁵ Confined within the parish house of Krašić, Stepinac was only allowed to receive visitors and entertain them in the sacristy. Nevertheless, he did manage to get letters and messages out through Mijo Pišonić, a secretary of sorts, who was in constant contact with him. See: HDA, RSUP-SRH-SDS, 001.15, Izjava o kleru, 14.

¹⁶ Alexander, *The Triple Myth*, 209.

epinac's magisterium, albeit posthumously, the Yugoslav government removed one of the major obstacles to improved relations between Belgrade and the Holy See.

LIBERALIZATION AND EMIGRATION IN 1960S YUGOSLAVIA

After a decade of economic growth, during which attempts were made to level inequalities in the country's various regions, Yugoslavia entered a recession. In January 1961, Slovenia and Croatia opposed the launch of a new five-year plan, making their support contingent on the enactment of laws to shrink the role of central bureaucracy in economic decisions. As a result, a legislative package conceived by Edvard Kardelj was approved three months later, whereby the prices of goods and services were liberalized, the country's credit system and fiscal policies toward companies were restructured, and foundations were laid for the dinar's convertibility. In three months, the prices of many goods and services increased by 30 percent, and unemployment soared. These setbacks were to be expected as the economy adjusted from a controlled regime to a partially market-driven system. Still, they engendered widespread discontent. The currency reform also caused troubles for trade and for industry. To pacify the population, Tito spoke out against the sudden rise in prices, but effectively did nothing to call into question the political decisions made during previous months.¹⁷ A year later, when indicators revealed the country's growth rate was much lower than in years past, conservatives waged their attack, branding the elements of liberalization introduced with the reform as disastrous. The reform was frozen, and the clash between those for and against it assumed a national character. Slovenian and Croatian leaders supported the reformist policies, while Serbian and Bosnian leaders took a conservative stance.

17 Cf. Magyar Országos Levéltár (Hungarian National Archive), XIX-J-1-j, 5/b-16/007768-1961; 5/c-2/002169-1961; 5/b-7/004801-1961.

In 1964, during the Eighth Congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, reformists and conservatives once again found themselves debating about various models of development. Enjoying support from a broad political and union front, as well as Tito's cautious yet tangible backing, reformists were ultimately able to secure majority in the congress. The Central Committee, the league's leading body, was renewed and almost half of its members replaced. New cadres were younger, hadn't fought the partisan war, and brought a new mindset and less dogmatism to the table.

In this climate, in the summer of 1965, the Yugoslav parliament passed the economic reform prepared by the Slovene Boris Kraigher with political support from Kardelj and the Croat Bakarić. The new laws arrived within an international context of solid economic expansion, and profoundly changed the Yugoslav economic system.¹⁸ "Political factories" set up in the early postwar years, whose production processes and facilities had by now become obsolete, were shut down. Quality, rather than quantity, became the main focus of industrial production. The federation retained its control over and power to emit the country's paper currency through the National Bank of Yugoslavia. Yet financial activities were greatly diversified. Investment banks and trade banks were born, and companies were able to procure the financial assets needed for their enterprises on the market. Through the reforms, the prejudice that cast small owners as the germ of capitalistic activity was overcome. Within precise limits, private initiative was permitted, particularly in tourism and agriculture, and owners were allowed to access credit for the purpose of buying farming and work tools.

The legislative package approved in 1965 changed the country's face. Borders opened up to a flow of foreign tourists, while Yugoslav citizens were ensured the right to passports. This made it possible for many workers, particularly Croats, to expatriate and seek employment abroad. At the time, the Yugoslav industry could not absorb the en-

¹⁸ Flaherty, "Self-Management and Requirements for Social Property," 9.

tire workforce moving from rural to industrialized areas. Further, the reform had made it easier for companies to dismiss employees whose work was no longer needed. Spontaneous emigration was therefore clearly instrumental in averting the risk of an abnormal rise in unemployment. In many areas of the federation, publications were circulated as a means of propaganda, prompting workers to relocate abroad. Western companies, particularly German ones, would send representatives to select immigrants among the workers awaiting expatriation. Towns managed the rules and regulations applying to the latter, while employment agencies collected data, put out information on the most sought-after positions, and gave instructions on the paperwork to be done in order to move.¹⁹

The Catholic Church also took advantage of this new space for liberty, once again finding a suitable outlet for communication with its followers in the press. Periodicals, liturgical books, and texts with the council's reforms were printed, circulated, and read in both Croatia and Slovenia. The archbishopric of Zagreb's periodical *Glas Koncila* (Voice of the Council), founded in October 1962, had a first run of 5,000 copies. In two years, this number increased tenfold, and in 1965 the Christmas issue was published in 150,000 copies.²⁰ Subscribers totaled only 5,000. Perhaps out of caution, most readers preferred to buy issues at church after Sunday mass, rather than have them sent to their houses. The archbishopric of Ljubljana's bimonthly magazine *Družina* was published in 105,000 copies, and the children's periodical *Mali Koncil* had a run of 90,000 copies. An additional 250,000 copies of various foreign editions completed the output. In Croatia and Slovenia, where Catholics were in the majority, parish churches became community

19 Attempts were even made to put a stop to the expatriation of specialized labor: in 1965, 30,000 of the 200,000 Yugoslavs working abroad were specialized technicians. The phenomenon worried the shrewdest politicians, and, finally, the "specialized" were allowed to leave only on the explicit request of a foreign company. Yet all citizens had the right to a ten-year passport. Thus, anyone who wanted to could expatriate using the pretense of tourism.

20 Open Society Archives (henceforth OSA), Yugoslavia, 300-10-2-75, Church Press is Operative in Yugoslavia, 1965.

centers; parish priests provided poorer students with an education, and organized outings, film screenings, choirs, and recreational activities. The media did not fail to draw attention to the speed with which the Catholic Church had managed to reestablish its commitment to society, speaking of an “offensive” on the part of the clergy.

THE RESUMPTION OF USTASHA TERRORISM

After Ante Pavelić died in December 1959, the landscape formed by cells connected to the Ustasha ideology further evolved. Personalism, rivalry, and economic interests marked this phase. Some hierarchs contested the *poglavnik*'s will and refused obedience to Hefer. In Spain, Vjekoslav Maks Luburić staked his claim to lead the Hrvatski Oslobodilački Prokret on the grounds that he had been the last commander of the armed forces of the Independent State of Croatia. His attempted succession failed, though, and the leadership of the movement founded by Pavelić remained in Buenos Aires in the hands of a triumvirate. From that moment on, Luburić set out on an increasingly militarist path, organizing the training of operative units in those European countries where his movement was well rooted, and publishing articles in the *Drina* on matters of military tactics and guerrilla techniques.²¹ While likewise engaging in anticommunist and anti-Yugoslav propaganda, other circles and associations of exiled Ustasha were more moderate in their approach. Their members were often employed in newspaper and magazine editorial staffs, university institutions, and Western propaganda centers, such as Munich-based Radio Free Europe.

The Hrvatska Akademija Amerike (Croatian Academy of America), an especially busy research center, had been active since 1953, publishing two magazines, the *Journal of Croatian Studies* and the *Croatia*

²¹ According to the Yugoslav secret services, Luburić set up an organization by the name of “Studio V” for special and psychological warfare against Yugoslavia. See: “Ekstremna politička emigracija,” 7.

Press, edited by Karlo Mirth. Mate Meštrović, Jere Jareb, and Bogdan Radica were the Academy's "masters of ceremony," and organized meetings and symposiums, including the one held in Switzerland in 1968 titled "Croatia Today and Tomorrow." The Academy advocated dialogue with the more open groups within the League of Communists, while also seeking out support from associations like the *Matrica Hrvatska*, an ancient and powerful Croatian cultural institution. Unlike the terrorist Luburić, the Academy's intellectuals believed the goal of disintegrating the Federation of Yugoslavia could be achieved by slowly weakening its centripetal and centralist forces.²² All Croatian nationalist circles, whether extremist or moderate, were able to garner support in their adoptive countries. In the United States, they enjoyed the backing of notable Republican politicians, including then-governor of California Ronald Reagan, who declared 10 April—the anniversary of Croatian independence—to be a national holiday.²³ Branko Jelić had obtained German citizenship thanks to the Christian-Democrat leader Franz Josef Strauss, who, incidentally, spared no expense to help Jelić's newspaper *Hrvatska Država*, as well as his movement.²⁴

In the early 1960s, the Ustasha universe—spread across three continents—was affected by at least two elements of novelty: the arrival on the scene of new players, most of whom had not gone through the experience of the Independent State of Croatia, and the resumption of terrorist activities. In 1960, the Franciscan Rafael Medić founded the *Tajni Ustaški Pokret* (Secret Ustasha Movement, TUP), whose aim was to "overthrow the established order in Yugoslavia through terrorist acts against Yugoslavia's diplomatic representatives, during cultural and sporting events, and against Yugoslav citizens." The movement's operative base was Dortmund, in a gymnasium and in the church served by Medić. On 29 November 1962, the Franciscan and other TUP mem-

²² OSA, Yugoslavia, Subject Files, Exiles, box 149, Anti-Yugoslav Émigré Activity and Its Domestic Influence Discussed.

²³ "Ekstremna politička emigracija," 5.

²⁴ OSA, Yugoslavia, Subject Files, Exiles, box 149, Anti-Yugoslav Émigré Activity and Its Domestic Influence Discussed.

bers carried out a terrorist attack, using explosives and firearms, against the Yugoslav economic office in the Swedish embassy in Bonn.²⁵ In the course of the operation, Momčilo Popović, one of the office's functionaries, was killed. Seized by the German police, Medić and his accomplices were sentenced to long prison terms.

In 1961, in Australia, Srećko Rover had founded the Hrvatsko Revolucionarno Bratstvo (Croatian Revolutionary Brotherhood, HRB), an organization devoted to carrying out terrorist attacks and demonstrative actions in Yugoslavia and abroad; for the first time, young emigrants joined the ranks of such an organization. In the summer of 1963, the Brotherhood infiltrated Yugoslavia with nine of its men, divided into three cells and equipped with weapons and dynamite. Within ten days they were all arrested before they could put up resistance or carry out any terrorist attacks. They were all young men aged between 24 and 30. To the court adjudicating their case they appeared to be a band of confused outsiders, rather than a group of dangerous criminals. Raised in Yugoslavia, they'd decided to look for employment elsewhere, to get over a heartbreak or simply to see the world. One of them, Rade Stojić, recounted that he had run away from Yugoslavia on 3 March 1960. Upon reaching Trieste, he had been taken to the camp in San Saba, where he had spent a month. "There were twenty or so emigrants, and we were regularly visited by the priests Josip Lončarić and Stjepan Borošak. The others told me that if I didn't enroll in one of the emigrant organizations I would not be granted asylum, and would have to go home. And so I joined the HOP (Hrvatski Osbodilački Pokret), which they told me was led by Stjepan Hefer. I paid the sum of 150 lire, and they gave me a membership card. About ten days later I was transferred to Latina, where I received political asylum. [...] On other members' suggestion, after getting my refugee passport, I chose to go to Australia. I arrived there by ship, embarking in Genoa." In Australia, Stojić became acquainted with Father Josip Kasić

25 MSPS, Fond PA, 1963, f. 90, d. 13, sign. b. 443920.

and Father Roko Romac. Kasić, who published the paper *Dom* (Home-land), was a point of reference for Croatian emigrants, as well as an expert in terrorism who had participated in operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina after the end of the war. Father Josip convinced Stojić to join the Hrvatsko Revolucionarno Bratstvo. Thus, in 1962, the young man took his oath before crucifix, rifle, and lit candle, and was recruited. He was then trained by Reverend Roko Romac. For some months, Stojić practiced using firearms and explosives alongside other aspiring terrorists. After a time, all of the men were transferred to Germany and later to Italy to complete their training. Finally, in July 1963, the three cells penetrated Yugoslavia.²⁶

The terrorist attack Medić carried out in Bonn and the Brotherhood's operation put the Yugoslav secret services in a state of alarm. The Ustasha universe had changed profoundly. The old hierarchs had given way to new cadres, who now plucked recruits from the thousands of Yugoslavs who, starting in the early 1960s, had been relocating for work to Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Scandinavia, Australia, and the Americas. By the mid-1960s the number of Yugoslavs who had expatriated to seek employment reached one million. The government imposed strict controls on the ways in which people moved out and back into the country, and even started offering aid to Yugoslav communities abroad, in order to prevent new emigrants from ending up in the net of political exiles after reaching their destination, and from increasing outside opposition to the regime.

In their turn, the leaders of the organizations in exile understood the importance of recruiting new emigrants. "Each bearer of a Yugoslav passport should become an active enemy of Yugoslavia," Mate Meštrović maintained. Branko Jelić echoed this sentiment: "Having a single holder of a Yugoslav passport within our ranks is preferable to having five emigrants [who lack it]."²⁷ Indeed, the difference between

²⁶ OSA, Yugoslavia, Subject Files, Exiles, box 150, 1973, Exclusive Report on 1963 Terrorist Group in Yugoslavia.

²⁷ "Ekstremna politička emigracija," 4.

the two classes of people was clear. Political exiles who had fled the country immediately after the war had no prospect of ever being able to return to their homeland legally, whereas those who expatriated for work reasons had a passport and could return to Yugoslavia anytime they wished to.

THE AGREEMENT BETWEEN YUGOSLAVIA AND THE VATICAN

The Second Vatican Council started in October 1962, and was called upon to address fundamental issues including interreligious dialogue, the sources of revelation, the means of social communication, and liturgy.²⁸ Then came the turn of John XXIII's encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, "on universal peace in truth, justice, charity, and liberty," addressed "to all men of good will." Speaking of rights, civil power, participation, and solidarity, the encyclical opened the Catholic Church to modernity without fear that it might be overwhelmed by it, for modernity itself was viewed as an opportunity for dialogue and exchange.

The council's turning point and the message set forth in *Pacem in Terris* were met with great interest in Belgrade, for they were in keeping with the ideals of the Non-Aligned Movement, the cornerstone of Yugoslav foreign policy. In the course of 1964, Paul VI, who succeeded John XXIII as pope, displayed the will to reach an understanding with Tito.²⁹ The Vatican and the government of Yugoslavia shared a memorandum on matters both parties had at heart. The Catholic clergy's conditions and opportunities for pastoral ministry were significantly better in Yugoslavia than in other Eastern European countries, but other problems existed that were hard to solve. For instance, some of the guarantees requested by the Catholic Church were openly at

28 The council's first session took place under John XXIII (11 October–8 December 1962); the others were held under Paul VI between 1963 and 1965.

29 The first agreement between the Holy See and a communist country was reached with Hungary on 15 September 1964. This was the first success obtained by the Vatican's *Ostpolitik*, whose undisputed protagonist was Monsignor Casaroli, undersecretary of the Sacred Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs (Casaroli, *Il martirio della pazienza*, 89–90).

odds with the Yugoslav constitution, which established the absolute equality before the law of all religious communities within a plurinational and multiconfessional state. Despite its best intentions to reach an agreement, Yugoslavia could not make concessions to the Catholic Church in violation of the general regulations in place for all religious communities.

The actual negotiations started in January 1965, when the Vatican plenipotentiary Monsignor Agostino Casaroli and Monsignor Luigi Bongianino arrived in Belgrade. In his memoirs, Casaroli recollects that, as he strolled around the park of the Belgrade fortress during a break from work one day, the air seemed “more open and lighter” to him than it had in Budapest and Prague, and that staying in Belgrade did not fill him with “the sense of oppression” he had almost felt he “could breathe in other communist countries.”³⁰

The Holy See had the resumption of diplomatic relations at heart, but did not believe subscribing an overall agreement was necessary. This was because it realized it would not be able to obtain much more than was already afforded by the Yugoslav constitution (in terms of principles and guarantees), and also because some Yugoslav bishops dreaded the bonds that would likely ensue from such an agreement, or were opposed to negotiating with the government on principle. The Yugoslav government, conversely, did consider reaching an overall agreement indispensable for normal diplomatic relations to be resumed.

In essence, Belgrade was not willing to set aside two matters it deemed crucial. The first one had to do with the Pontifical College of St. Jerome, regarding which the Yugoslav government made the following requests: that it be opened to priests hailing from non-Croatian dioceses; that its rector be a Yugoslav citizen appointed with the government’s approval; that during holidays and celebrations the college raise the Yugoslav flag; that ecclesiastics hostile to socialist Yugoslavia be dismissed. In his memoirs, Casaroli claims the Holy See

³⁰ Casaroli, *Il martirio della pazienza*, 210–13.

had no qualms about providing assurances that the college's purposes were ecclesiastical and religious, but that committing all of this to paper raised perplexities back in Rome. The second matter was reason for even greater embarrassment. The Yugoslav government demanded the Holy See's explicit condemnation of each and every act of terrorism, for members of the clergy were ever present in the attacks carried out by the Ustasha and by other extremist circles against Yugoslav institutions and personalities. Monsignor Casaroli and the Yugoslav representatives wanted to reach an understanding on these points as well, but decided to address them in the course of a second round of negotiations to take place after they had a chance to probe their respective camps, where there was no lack of resistance.

In Yugoslavia, the agreement was opposed by the regime's second-in-command, the Serbian conservative Aleksandar Ranković.³¹ (Whereas it was backed by reformists, like the Slovene Edvard Kardelj and the Croat Vladimir Bakarić.) In the Vatican, the need for caution—and in some cases downright opposition to the agreement—was voiced by certain cardinals, including Carlo Confalonieri and Pietro Parente, and by some members of the Sacred Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs, which was to give its opinion to the pontiff. Monsignor Amleto Cicognani, at the head of the Secretariat of State, was likewise conservative by character, as well as by conviction. However, a progressive attitude prevailed within the department, and Cicognani's attempts to resist the agreement were limited.³²

To bring the negotiations to fruition, Monsignor Casaroli also needed the support of the Yugoslav episcopate, and particularly of the primate of Croatia, Franjo Šeper, at the head of the country's largest

³¹ According to Ranković, the reforms would end up benefitting only two republics, namely Slovenia and Croatia, to the detriment of the rest of the federation. While the argument was not unfounded, the Serbian conservative's unyielding opposition to the changes of 1965 was mostly due to the political power struggle then in progress, in which Ranković enjoyed the support of the UDBA. Indeed, the secret services favored centralism and opposed liberalization.

³² HDA, RSUP-SRH-SDS, 001.15, Izjava o kleru, 55.

Catholic community. While in favor of restoring diplomatic relations, Šeper believed the Catholic Church would gain no advantage from too binding an agreement, and that in any case it should not be compelled to condemn terrorism explicitly. Casaroli returned to Belgrade in May 1965, and the second round of meetings resulted in a draft of an agreement, which the parties would sign when formally resuming diplomatic relations. The protocol was supposed to ensure fairer relations between State and Church. According to Casaroli, this was “a basis, and a limited one at that,” focusing on just a few points on which it had been possible to reach an agreement. On other issues—that is, on requests not shared by both parties—it was decided to make recourse to “unilateral documents” maintained by the two parties as “declarations of intent.”³³ While accepting this limited basis, Yugoslavia had not waived its demands regarding the Church’s prerequisite rejection and condemnation of terrorism. When the Vatican plenipotentiary expounded the draft to Archbishop Šeper on his way back to Rome, he was therefore met with a firm refusal.

For months, Agostino Casaroli tried to convince the archbishop of Zagreb to come to terms, but to no avail. In May 1966, Šeper went to Rome and delivered a memorandum to Paul VI. In this document, he claimed committing to take measures against priests involved in political activities or acts of terrorism would seem like “a successful attempt on the part of the federal government to bend the Holy See to its anti-Croatian policy.” Šeper’s characterization of the policy as anti-Croatian caused much perplexity. Monsignor Casaroli wondered why he hadn’t referred to it as being antireligious or anti-Catholic instead.³⁴ By shifting the focus on a strictly national plane, Šeper ended up undermining his opposition to the draft. And after all, the archbishop of Zagreb’s theory was unfounded: at the time, the federal government was not anti-Croatian at all; the political reins of the country were by

³³ Casaroli, *Il martirio della pazienza*, 230.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 230 and 243.

now in the hands of the liberal reformists headed by the Croat Bakarić and the Slovene Kardelj, both in favor of signing the protocol, while the Serb Ranković resisted it. In his stubborn opposition to the agreement, Šeper thus found himself on the same side as the conservative Ranković. The losing side, that is. The cardinal ultimately had to yield to the pope and to Casaroli, and, albeit for different reasons, Ranković was ousted from power.³⁵

Agostino Casaroli and Milutin Morača signed the agreement between the Holy See and the Yugoslav federal government on 25 June 1966, in Belgrade.³⁶ A bare bones document containing the essentials, the protocol was an important success for Casaroli and the progressive front within the Vatican. Diplomatic relations interrupted by Tito fourteen years before were restored at last. An apostolic delegate was immediately sent to Belgrade, and a representative of the Yugoslav government was likewise dispatched to the Vatican. On the crucial matter of terrorism, the Yugoslav government had received satisfaction. Point 2 of the protocol reads as follows: "In conformity with the principles of Catholic morality, the Holy See disapproves of and condemns all acts of terrorism and similar forms of political violence. In keeping with this, the Holy See declares its willingness to consider charges set forth by the Yugoslav government in the event that Catholic ecclesiastics have taken part in such actions against Yugoslavia, to take measures and, if the case may be, to carry out appropriate proceedings as prescribed by canon law."³⁷

Monsignor Mario Cagna, who arrived in Belgrade as the apostolic delegate, had some difficulty at first in finding his bearings in the complex Yugoslav landscape and in reaching an understanding with Zagreb's archbishop. Conversely, Vjekoslav Cvrle, the Yugoslav representative—who offered the pope a sculpture by Ivan Meštrović, a personal

35 In June 1966, an investigation commission was set up to inquire into the UDBA and Ranković. Irregularities and all manner of abuse of power came to light, and finally the Serbian politician was forced to resign (Kesar, *Leka Aleksandar Ranković*).

36 Milutin Morača was at the head of the Federal Commission for Religious Affairs.

37 MSPS, Fond PA, 1966, f. 211, d. 4, sign. b. 423960.

gift from Tito—was not “discriminated against for being a communist” and always received “great attention on the part of his interlocutors.”³⁸

Following the agreement, a remarkable consonance between the Vatican and Yugoslavia in international politics became apparent. From the get-go, on exchanging representatives, Tito and Paul VI made similar assessments in their official statements, regarding both the need to overcome the war in Vietnam and the question of the Middle East. Later, when Tito censured the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, rejecting Brezhnev’s doctrine of limited sovereignty to the satellite states, the Vatican voiced its approval of the Yugoslav line.³⁹ Finally, the issue of social justice—close to Tito’s heart—lay at the core of Paul VI’s encyclical *Populorum Progressio* sent in March 1967. Persuaded that achieving social justice was the greatest challenge for the contemporary world, Paul VI pointed to the growing chasm between rich, developed countries and poor, underdeveloped countries as the most serious threat to world peace. For the first time, a pontifical document touched on the matter of private property. “The right to private property is not absolute and unconditional,” the pope said, and “no one may appropriate surplus goods solely for his own private use when others lack the bare necessities of life.”⁴⁰ In Yugoslavia, the encyclical met with broad support. Drawing attention to the text’s criticism of unbridled capitalism as a generator of inequality and injustice in the world, the *Borba* spoke of “a huge step forward by the Vatican, something akin to a revolution.”⁴¹

DRAGANOVIĆ’S RETURN

Dismissed from St. Jerome’s in the fall of 1958, Krunoslav Draganović moved to Austria, claiming he wished to retreat to the peace and quiet of a convent to write a book on the tragedy of Bleiburg and the suffer-

38 MSPS, Fond PA, 1969, f. 224, d. 2, sign. 49766. The Croat Ivan Meštrović is considered one of the greatest sculptors of the twentieth century. He lived in the United States for a long time.

39 Ibid., 1968 f. 225, d. 6, sign. b. 440035.

40 Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*.

41 OSA, Yugoslavia, 300-10-3, Yugoslav Papers Comment on Pope’s Encyclical Letter, 1967.

ing Tito's regime imposed on the Croatian population, availing himself of a great deal of unpublished documents, gathered in the course of the years. Yet he kept in touch with several Ustasha communities, frequented Jelić's group in Munich, and often returned to Italy. Also, it is likely that between 1959 and 1962 he once again collaborated with the US secret service in clandestine operations and as an informant.⁴² In 1964, Draganović settled in Pressbaum, near Vienna. He had obtained Austrian citizenship, and was writing about Bleiburg. Three years later, in September 1967, he took off for Trieste, and once there vanished into thin air.⁴³ A few days later, the Yugoslav radio and television announced the reverend had voluntarily returned to his homeland, after writing the Yugoslav government a letter requesting to benefit from amnesty.⁴⁴

The organizations of the opposition in exile—first and foremost among them the Ustasha—reacted with indignation, claiming Draganović had been abducted by the UDBA and was fated for the worst. In Rome, Father Tomas's pro-Ustasha group, which enjoyed the support of the far-right press, organized demonstrations calling for Draganović to be set free, with participation from small neofascist groups. Yet the unrest of the Croatian community was a small matter

42 Recently declassified documents seem to prove the collaboration between Draganović and the US secret service in several operations in the course of the Cold War, including the recruitment of Croatian mercenaries to help the Dominican Republic in its struggle against Castro and the supply of exit visas to Nazi war criminals in 1961. The relationship lasted until 23 January 1962, when it was abruptly cut short by the Americans for security reasons, lack of control, and the excessive requests for American financial support and other kinds of backing to Croatian organizations as partial compensation for the cooperation. The US secret service ultimately realized it was mostly working for him.

43 In a book recently published in Croatia, Draganović is dubbed the "Ustasha James Bond." The volume partly references chronicles and information already circulated in the press, and recounts that Draganović met with two UDBA agents in Trieste, near the Hotel San Giusto, on 10 September 1967; around 5 p.m., he allegedly got into a Mercedes bearing a Yugoslavian license plate and passed over the Italian–Yugoslavian border at the Kozina crossing point. While providing no references or notes, the volume contains many other interesting details on Draganović's life and dealings. Rašeta, *Ustaški James Bond*, 13–15.

44 In Yugoslavia, Draganović had been placed under investigation for a number of crimes he was alleged to have committed both during the war and after it. To reenter the country he had availed himself of the many amnesties issued by the regime, the most recent dated 1966.

compared to the panic that swept over the American intelligence, troubled by all that Draganović could reveal.

The reaction of the Yugoslav press was wholly different. As acutely observed by the Belgrade newspaper *Politika*, the conditions that had made possible Draganović's return to Yugoslavia had arisen against "a background that was political in nature, rather than police-related."⁴⁵ With cutting irony, the *Književne Novine* reported that Draganović's was the first instance of "a war criminal readmitted into the country, and allowed to hold a press conference to 'forgive' socialist Yugoslavia and its sons for the way they'd treated him."⁴⁶ The journalists of Zagreb's *Večernji List* had their pictures taken as they wandered about the city with the reverend. The Yugoslav authorities had granted him freedom of movement, pending a decision on whether or not he should stand trial before a Yugoslav court. In a long letter to the court of Sarajevo, which was made public, Draganović claimed he had "always spoken out for the freedom and independence of the Croatian people," and had done so "not for reasons of personal gain or ambition." In this regard, he had nothing to blame himself for, he said. He only regretted that he'd "collided against the love and rights of other peoples" in his pursuit, and that he had failed "fully to understand the tenets of the Church today," as well as his "obligation of obedience." He claimed he was "impressed" by the speed with which the country had modernized and democratized itself, and finally praised "the humanity of the Yugoslav government."⁴⁷

The risk of a public trial, sensationalized by the media, worried the Holy See. Through Cardinal Cicognani, the Vatican unofficially sounded out the Yugoslav authorities' intentions. News that Draganović would not have to stand to trial and would be allowed to live undisturbed in Sarajevo was met "with clear gratitude and satisfaction" in

⁴⁵ In *Politika*, 12 November 1967, 11.

⁴⁶ In *Književne Novine*, 25 November 1967, 2.

⁴⁷ "Pop Draganović objašnjava."

the Vatican.⁴⁸ It was no longer the time for ferocious trials. And in any case the “Good Father,” with his many secrets, would cause trouble not only for the Holy See and the United States, but also for the Yugoslav government. Given that he had publicly repented, the best course of action was just to leave him alone.⁴⁹

Extremist circles of Croatian emigrants would not budge, however. In the fall of 1967, two young Romans arrived in Sarajevo by car, and met with Draganović in a church sacristy. They bore a missive penned by Roman “friends” urging him to flee. A rubber motorboat was ready to pick him up near Dubrovnik and take him to Italy. The reverend thanked them, but declined, saying his life was in Sarajevo now.⁵⁰ From that moment on, he kept to himself, teaching classes in the seminary and writing a biography of Katarina Vukčić-Kosača, the queen who had transferred the Bosnian crown to the Holy Mother Church.⁵¹

THE EXPLOSION OF TERRORISM AND THE CROATIAN SPRING

Much more than by the Draganović case, the Croatian opposition in exile had been dealt a harsh blow by the agreement between Yugoslavia and the Holy See. In the summer of 1966, soon after the protocol was signed, Father Tomas’s small band of men leveled an attack at the progressives within the Curia and at Paul VI himself. These Vatican authorities were accused of having capitulated to “Yugoslav commu-

48 MSPS, Fond PA, 1969, f. 224, d. 2, sign. b. 49766.

49 Shortly after returning to Yugoslavia, Draganović was subjected to lengthy questioning by the UDBA, and he handed over his journals and a number of personal documents. For long days he answered all of the questions posed to him by the UDBA official, but did so with such skill, mixing prolixity and inconclusiveness, that he ended up not revealing much of anything. Records of the interrogation are held in Zagreb’s state archives: HDA, RSUP-SRH-SDS, 001.14, Istražni zapisnik Krunoslava Draganovića. According to Boris Rašeta, however, the documents held in Zagreb’s state archives are but a small part of all the records produced during Draganović’s questioning; these are claimed to amount to about 9,000 pages (Rašeta, *Ustaški James Bond*, 11).

50 Bogdan, *Papinski Hrvatski Zavod Svetog Jeronima*, 833.

51 Draganović, *Katarina Kosača-Kotromanić*. The author died in Sarajevo aged seventy-nine on 5 July 1983.

nists” and of “having betrayed the national and ecclesiastical interests” of Croats.⁵² As for the terrorist organizations spawned by the Ustasha, they responded to the situation carrying out a great number of terrorist attacks in several parts of the world. An employee of the Yugoslav consulate in Stuttgart and a Yugoslav citizen in Frankfurt were killed in the summer of 1966. The next year, a man was seriously injured in an attack against the Yugoslav consulate general in Melbourne. In 1968, the most violent attacks took place in Belgrade: an explosive device was set off in the central station in May, and two months later a bomb caused the death of a young man and injured 83 people in the 20 October Movie Theater. In 1970, the embassy in Brussels and the consulate in Melbourne were targeted. In 1971, it was the turn of the consulate in Gothenburg. Different cells working for a number of organizations claimed responsibility for the attacks.

The surge in terrorism occurred at a time when strong nationalist claims were being made in Croatia, undermining the Yugoslav political system. In a debate on the economic relations among Yugoslavia's republics, which included the participation of Croatia's highest-ranking politicians and the federation's leading elite, authoritative voices had raised the issue of the decentralization of financial activities and of the management of the wealth produced within the boundaries of each republic. The Croatian intelligentsia took advantage of this to expose the alleged unequal distribution of wealth on the part of the federation to the detriment of Croatia. In January 1970, the 10th Plenum of the Croatian Central Committee took place against this backdrop. During the assembly, the two different factions present within the committee clashed: “unitarists” viewed Yugoslav integrity as more important than Croatia's financial aspirations, while nationalists believed their homeland was being “robbed [...] and that all capital and investment [was]

52 MSPS, Fond PA, 1969, f. 224, d. 2, sign. b. 49766. Ousted from the Vatican Radio, Tomas became a catechist in a Roman gymnasium. Other notables among the Croatian priests who had previously worked with Draganović included Milan Simčić, the go-to person in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and Krešimir Zorić, the canon for the Lateran Church.

essentially concentrated in Serbia.”⁵³ The Plenum ruled that “unitarism” was Croatia’s main political enemy, and that Croatia must not yield to centralism in any way. Croatian leaders thought Yugoslavia should become a true federation of sovereign republics, respectful of the diverse identities and inclinations present among its member states. This was the first time a republic’s highest political authorities discussed federal politics and interrepublic relations, and laid out a new political platform full of implications for the whole federation.

Broad segments of civil society coalesced around these nationalist claims, giving rise to a movement that in a matter of months was able to gain mass support—the so-called Croatian Spring (Hrvatsko Proljeće, also called the Mass Movement [Masovni Pokret], MASPOK). MASPOK managed to place representatives at the top of companies, the media, and political institutions. Soon, a longing for renewal in the national and nationalist sense washed over all fields of civil life, as embodied in all kinds of associations. For some Croatian nationalists, the notion of republican sovereignty was one and the same with national homogeneity: state and nation were viewed as inseparable and exclusive, with potentially dire consequences, given the large Serbian community living in Croatia.⁵⁴ The demonstration held in Zagreb in May 1971 features among the crucial steps in the Croatian Spring. Indeed, the anniversary of the defeat of the Nazi fascists became the occasion for an oceanic gathering in the city center.⁵⁵ The following 29 October, members of MASPOK and students from the University of Zagreb asked that Croatia join the UN, that a republican national bank be set up, and that the republic be given the right to direct access to the international credit system. The movement, heterogeneous in makeup, was subjected to the pressure of its extremist fringes, which wanted to force the leaders of the Croatian party to back their requests.

⁵³ Bilandžić, *Hrvatska moderna povijest*, 565.

⁵⁴ Djilas, *The Contested Country*, 227–28.

⁵⁵ Regarding the “Croatian Spring,” see Baletić, *Prekinuta Šutnja*; Šentija, *Razgovori s Mikom Tripalom o hrvatskom proljeću*.

It was then Tito decided to take action, and Croatian ambitions shattered against the marshal's and the military's firm determination not to change the country's social and political order. Accused of being responsible for what was happening, Zagreb's political leaders were forced to resign. A "normalization" phase started throughout Croatia, with purges reminiscent of the ones that had taken place during the anti-Cominform era. Political cadres, company managers and employees alike were driven away from their workplaces, magazines were shut down, and the spaces of democracy were significantly reduced. Those who managed to avoid prison nevertheless fell into disgrace. Others expatriated. Meanwhile, the Serbs of Croatia regained positions of power in public administration, as well as within companies and the media. Titoist centralism once again prevailed, and all nationalist claims were banished from the scope of Croatian politics.

Throughout the Croatian Spring, the organizations of political exiles were in contact with the movement. Militarist groups within the émigré community even carried out a number of sensational terrorist attacks. On 7 April 1971, in Stockholm, they killed the Yugoslav ambassador Vladimir Rolović and wounded his secretary. On 26 January 1972, a JAT (Yugoslav Airlines) DC-9 was blown up over Czechoslovakia, killing twenty-seven. Three days later, an explosive device destroyed the Jugotours headquarters in Stockholm, and another bomb set off on the Vienna–Zagreb express train wounded six passengers.

In an attempt to curb terrorism, the UDBA did not hesitate to resort to political homicides. In 1965 Geza Pašti was killed in Nice, and in 1967 Marijan Šimundić met the same fate in Stuttgart. Both men belonged to the Hrvatsko Revolucionarno Bratstvo. In 1969, Vjekoslav-Maks Luburić was killed in Valencia by an agent who had infiltrated his organization. By various means, the UDBA got rid of over twenty-five "opponents," though it was unable to eradicate the problem. At the end of June 1972, a group of nineteen terrorists coming mostly from Australia received its final instructions by Father Vilim Cecelja, in Austria, and crossed the Yugoslav border under the leadership

of Ambroz Andrić.⁵⁶ They were all members of the Hrvatsko Revolucionarno Bratstvo. As soon as they reached Bosnia-Herzegovina, they went into hiding in an unrealistic bid to spark an anticommunist insurrection. They were found out, and encircled by police and army units. Fifteen of them were killed, and the other four were captured and put on trial in Sarajevo.⁵⁷ On 18 August, the Ustasha branch active in Gothenburg succeeded in getting Ambassador Rolović's killers out of the prison in Ulma. They were arrested the very next day. On 15 September, three Croatian terrorists hijacked a Swedish airplane. In exchange for the passengers' release, the terrorists asked for a number of Ustasha to be freed, including the ambassador's killers. The government of Stockholm gave in to this request, and the entire lot of terrorists was granted asylum in Spain.

In the following years, the terrorist acts continued to take place in several parts of the world. In this phase, some observers believe the Ustasha groups enjoyed support from the KGB, which saw destabilizing Yugoslavia as politically useful for the USSR. This theory still needs to be verified historically, but, if it were true, it would point to a well-tested system. Since its inception, the Ustasha movement always had backing from one sovereign state or another, lacking which it would not have managed to make itself so sadly relevant and talked-about.⁵⁸

These possible interconnections and entanglements aside, the continued presence and involvement of men of the cloth is a fact we cannot dismiss. Franciscan friars and their monasteries, and many other religious, Croatian and otherwise, spread around the world, were a constant point of reference for the Ustasha. We believe we have provided proof of these ties, heeding what the documents say and remaining

56 OSA, Exclusive Report on 1963 Terrorist Group in Yugoslavia, 62.

57 Pirjevec, "Yugoslav Political Emigration to Australia," 1–2.

58 Paolo Cucchiarelli addresses in detail the Ustasha's possible involvement in the terrorist attacks that caused much bloodshed in Italy starting with the attack on the Banca Nazionale dell'Agricoltura, in Milan, on 12 December 1969, and continuing for the whole duration of the "railway bombings" era, on which to this day very little light has been shed (Cucchiarelli, *Il segreto di Piazza Fontana*).

faithful to historical research. There is no polemical intent on our part, and we hope we have not indulged in unfounded generalization. In 1999, the US attorney Jonathan Levy brought a legal action against the Vatican Bank (Istituto per le Opere di Religione, IOR) and the Franciscan Order in behalf of many victims of the Ustasha. The suit rested on the fact that the Ustasha had looted gold and other valuables from the victims of their atrocities—Ukrainians, Serbs, antifascist Croats, Jews, and Romani—and that a large part of these assets had been taken into custody, concealed, used, and converted by the Vatican Bank and the Franciscan Order. Through the assistance of these two religious institutions, the Ustasha booty had later served to get many members into Spain and Argentina, and to finance the movement's revival. According to the prosecution, a common plan and a common line of conduct existed between the bank and its codefendants.⁵⁹ The documentary evidence supporting the prosecution's charges comes from reports United States and British secret agents drafted at the time of the events, accessible in Washington and London archives.⁶⁰ However, in the time elapsed since the events, doubts as to the court's jurisdiction, and other matters of a legal nature have jeopardized the case. But the suit's outcome will not change history's verdict, which calls attention to the heavy involvement of religious men and institutions in all phases of the Ustasha movement, one of the bloodiest and most violent terrorist organizations of the twentieth century.

59 Pollard, *L'obolo di San Pietro*, 270.

60 One of the most explicit documents is a report by the Office of Strategic Service (OSS) to the Department of Treasury in Washington, DC. In this report, the official Emerson Bigelow claims the Croatian treasure taken to Rome had been kept in the Vatican for safekeeping and was later transferred to Argentina and Spain. USNA, Office of Strategic Service (1919–1948), RG 226, entry 183, box 29, 1946.

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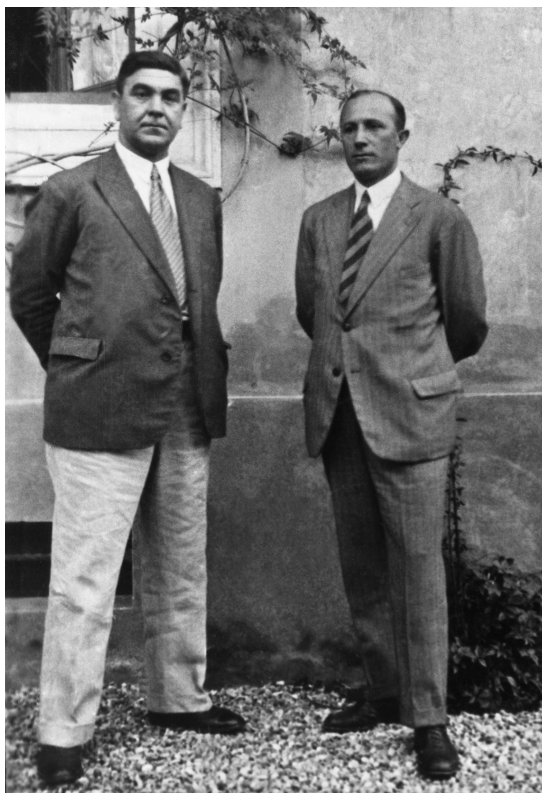
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The founder of the Ustasha movement Ante Pavelić (on the left) and the leader of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization Ivan "Vance" Mihailov met for the first time in Sofia in April 1929 to devise a common plan for terrorist attacks against Alexander Karađorđević's Kingdom of Yugoslavia. *The Croatian History Museum, HPM, F-2644.*

From left to right: Andrija Artuković, an unknown Ustasha, Mile Budak and Vjekoslav Servatzy, three "colonels" of the armed organization in the Ustasha movement's clandestine phase. *The Croatian History Museum, HPM, 77994.*





A drill conducted by the Ustasha nucleus on the Tuscan-Emilian Apennines. Stevo Duić (in the foreground), formerly a colonel in the Austro-Hungarian army, was one of the men in charge of the military training. *The Croatian History Museum, HPM, 77997.*

From left to right: Mijo Babić, Georgijev “Vlado” Cernozemski, and Zvonko Pospišil. “Vlado” the Macedonian, a Nucleus instructor, was the man who killed King Alexander in Marseilles. Pospišil belonged to the group of terrorists that acted in Marseilles, and together with the other Ustasha Babić had previously killed the journalist Toni Schlegel in Zagreb. *The Croatian History Museum, HPM, 77995.*





King of Yugoslavia Alexander I Karadorđević (on the left), greeted in Marseilles by French Foreign Affairs Minister Jean-Louis Barthou on 9 October 1934. *JUSP Jasenovac*, 745: JSV-78/07-64.

The scene of the attempt on the king's life: "Vlado" the Macedonian has shot the Yugoslav king dead, and gets wounded by the saber of a mounted officer. The former will still manage to kill a policeman before dying on rue Canebière. *JUSP Jasenovac*, 745: JSV-71/07-52.





Ante Pavelić (on the right) and Slavko Kvaternik in Zagreb in the early months following the proclamation of the Independent State of Croatia. Up until January 1943, Kvaternik served as the armed forces minister and favored the relationship with the Germans, opposing the Italians. *The Croatian History Museum, HPM, k. H, f. 1, 12416/40.*

Ante Pavelić and Raffaele Casertano (on the left) with two Italian officers. Casertano was Mussolini's ambassador in Zagreb from April 1941 to July 1943. *The Croatian History Museum, HPM, k. H, f. 19, 12434/11.*





Ante Pavelić and Galeazzo Ciano in Monfalcone. The whole time he served as foreign minister, from June 1936 to February 1943, Ciano treated with Pavelić directly on behalf of Mussolini. *The Croatian History Museum, HPM, k. H, f. 1, 12416/67.*



June 1941, Riva del Garda. The Savoy flag and the flag of the Independent State of Croatia hang from the windows of the Lipella barracks. The Croatian motto "Za Dom spremni" (For the homeland, ready!) is visible above the entrance door. The Croatian Legion was housed here before it was dispatched with the Italian Expeditionary Corps in Russia. *The Croatian History Museum, HPM, 87401-2.*



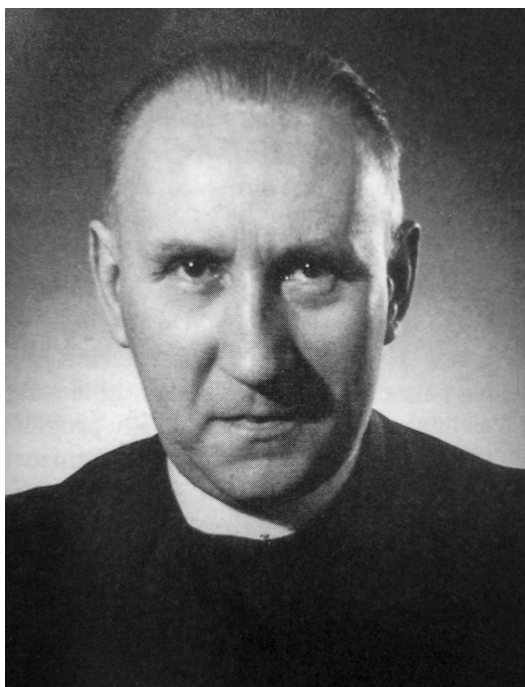
From left to right: the Reich's chargé d'affaires in Zagreb Herbert von Troll, the Wehrmacht's military plenipotentiary in Croatia Edmund Glaise von Horstenau, the defense minister of the Independent State of Croatia Slavko Kvaternik, the commander of Italy's 2nd Army Mario Roatta and the archbishop of Zagreb Monsignor Alojzije Stepinac. *The Croatian History Museum, HPM, FR-6385.*

Ante Pavelić at a meeting with Archbishop Stepinac (on his right) and three other monsignors, most likely on the occasion of an episcopal conference held in Zagreb between 18 and 20 November 1941. *The Croatian History Museum, HPM, k. H, f. 6, 12421/1.*





Reverend Vilim Cecelja, in the center, between Ismet Muftić (on the left) and Evangelical Bishop Michael Beker. Cecelja served as confessor to Ante Pavelić and his family, intermediary between the poglavnik and Zagreb's archbishopric, and military chaplain in the ranks of the Croatian army. In the course of 1944 he moved to Austria, where he led a section of the Red Cross and of the Croatian Caritas; in this capacity, he was able to organize the escape of dozens of Ustasha to Italy and South America. *The Croatian History Museum, HPM, N-7074-17.*



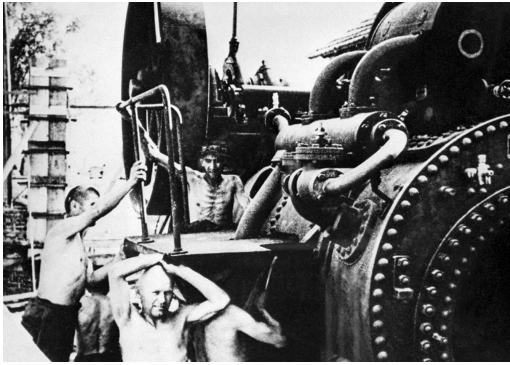
Monsignor Krunoslav Draganović started his long career as the secretary of Ivan Šarić, the Ustasha archbishop in Sarajevo. He went to Rome as Ante Pavelić's unofficial ambassador in 1943, and stayed there until the mid-1950s to organize the escape routes for the Ustasha and Nazis. *JUSP Jasenovac, 745: JSV-71/07-30.*



The prison-camp in Stara Gradiška, a short distance from the Jasenovac concentration camp. The wing of the building the Croatian and Muslim prisoners were detained in is visible in the photograph. *JUSP Jasenovac*, 745: JSV-71/07-82.

The chain factory building, in the Jasenovac concentration camp, was destroyed by the fleeing Ustasha; this is what it looked like on 15 May 1945. *JUSP Jasenovac*, 745: JSV-86/07-81.





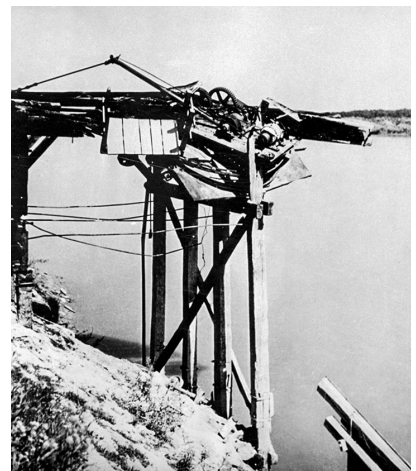
August 1942. Jasenovac prisoners at work in the camp's power station. *JUSP Jasenovac*, 745: JSV-85/07-35.

August 1942. Jasenovac prisoners at work under the sun. On the background, the camp's shacks. *JUSP Jasenovac*, 745: JSV-72/07-28.

Executioners at work. A group of Ustasas in a common grave after a mass execution. *JUSP Jasenovac*, 745: JSV-85/07-29.



The Granik. Originally the jetty had been built to launch and haul boats on the Sava, but between 1941 and 1945 it was used for the execution of Jasenovac prisoners, whose bodies could be disposed of in the river. *JUSP Jasenovac*, 745: JSV-81/07-30.





Italian *bersaglieri* inspect a house set on fire in Ratovici (Gračac) by the Ustasha on 15 August 1941. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministero deli Affari Esteri, MAE), AP 1931-1945, Yugoslavia, b. 138, previously unpublished photographic documentation on the Ustasha massacres 1941-1943.*

Serbian church destroyed by the Ustasha in the village of Ratovici on 7 August 1941. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministero deli Affari Esteri, MAE), AP 1931-1945, Yugoslavia, b. 138, previously unpublished photographic documentation on the Ustasha massacres 1941-1943.*





Serbian women saved from the Ustashas and led to Gračac to be provided with food and shelter. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministero deli Affari Esteri, MAE), AP 1931–1945, Yugoslavia, b. 138, previously unpublished photographic documentation on the Ustasha massacres 1941–1943.*



Serbian children slaughtered by the Ustashas and thrown among rocks in a wooded area near Ratovici (Gračac) on 5 August 1941. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministero deli Affari Esteri, MAE), AP 1931–1945, Yugoslavia, b. 138, previously unpublished photographic documentation on the Ustasha massacres 1941–1943.*

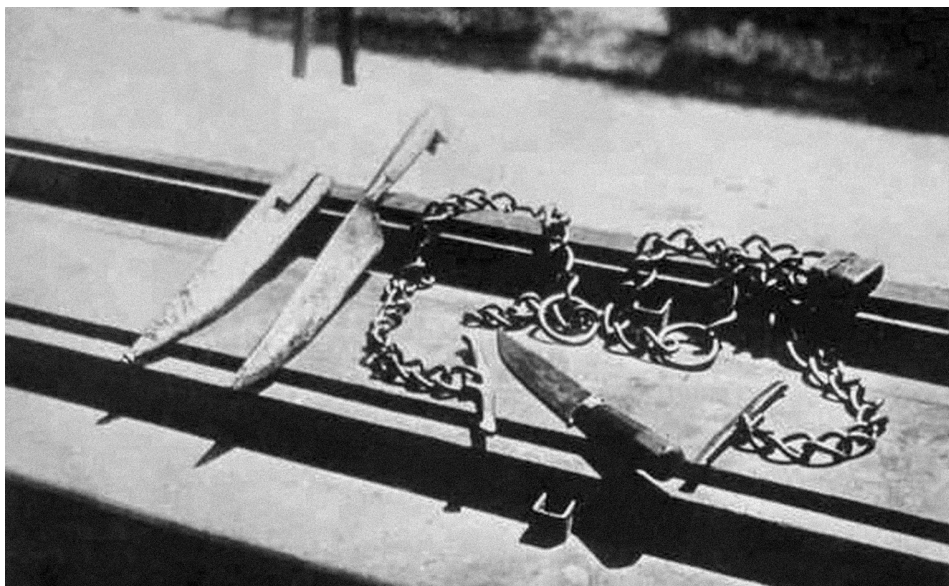


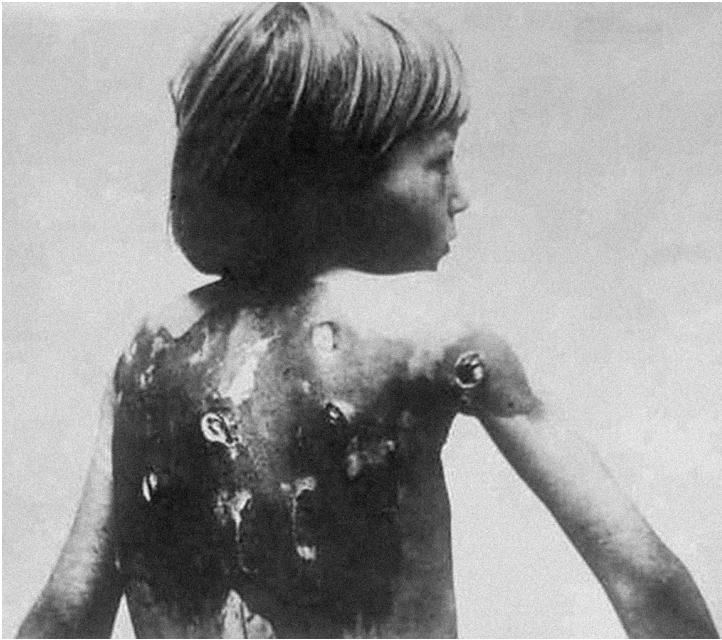
Dead body of a Serbian woman in advanced pregnancy, part of a family comprising seven people, all of them slaughtered by the Ustashas in Ratovici (Gračac) on 4 August 1941. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministero deli Affari Esteri, MAE), AP 1931–1945, Yugoslavia, b. 138, previously unpublished photographic documentation on the Ustasha massacres 1941–1943.*



Remains of fourteen Serbs belonging to three families from Avtovac, brutally killed in their houses by Ustashas; their bodies were subsequently placed in one room and set on fire. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministero deli Affari Esteri, MAE), AP 1931-1945, Yugoslavia, b. 138, previously unpublished photographic documentation on the Ustasha massacres 1941-1943.*

Knin, 5 August 1941. Tools used by the Ustashas to tie up and slit the throats of Serbian women and children. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministero deli Affari Esteri, MAE), AP 1931-1945, Yugoslavia, b. 138, previously unpublished photographic documentation on the Ustasha massacres 1941-1943.*





Nine-year old girl from Gračac wounded by the Ustashas with bayonet blows. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministero deli Affari Esteri, MAE), AP 1931-1945, Yugoslavia, b. 138, previously unpublished photographic documentation on the Ustasha massacres 1941-1943.*

August 1941. Dead bodies of a few hundred Orthodox farmers, tortured, killed in mass and buried in the basement and garden of a man named Dogor, an Ustasha from Havinje. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministero deli Affari Esteri, MAE), AP 1931-1945, Yugoslavia, b. 138, previously unpublished photographic documentation on the Ustasha massacres 1941-1943.*





Corpses of slaughtered Serbs, retrieved from the waters of the Narenta at Metković. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministero deli Affari Esteri, MAE), AP 1931–1945, Yugoslavia, b. 138, previously unpublished photographic documentation on the Ustashe massacres 1941–1943.*

July 1941. One of the corpses pulled out of the Narenta at Metković, displaying clear signs of torture. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministero deli Affari Esteri, MAE), AP 1931–1945, Yugoslavia, b. 138, previously unpublished photographic documentation on the Ustashe massacres 1941–1943.*



Nationalism and Terror

This book covers the full story of the Ustasha, a fascist movement in Croatia, from its historic roots to its downfall. The authors address key questions: In what international context did Ustasha terrorism grow and develop? How did this movement rise to power, and then exterminate hundreds of thousands of innocents? Who was Ante Pavelić, its leader? Was he a shrewd politician, able to exploit for his independent project Mussolini's imperial ambitions, Hitler's pan-German aims, and the anti-Bolshevism of the Holy See and the Western bloc? Or was he, consciously or not, a pawn in other hands, in a complex international scenario where Croatia was only arena among many? And after the movement's collapse, how were several of the most prominent Ustasha leaders able to evade capture by Tito's victorious army? The book places the appearance of the Ustasha movement not only in the context of the interwar Kingdom of Yugoslavia but also in the wider perspective of the emergence of European fascism.



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